



Cambodian Genocide Museums and Memorials: A Medium for Transmitting Intergenerational Cultural Memory

by Colin Kim Lim

This thesis/dissertation document has been electronically approved by the following individuals:

Law, Jane Marie (Chairperson)

Willford, Andrew C. (Minor Member)

CAMBODIAN GENOCIDE MUSEUMS AND MEMORIALS: A
MEDIUM FOR TRANSMITTING INTERGENERATIONAL
CULTURAL MEMORY

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by

Colin Kim Lim

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ABSTRACT

This paper, based on field research and oral interviews with museum attendees in the United States and Cambodia, examines the role of four memorial museums in promoting shared intergenerational cultural memory from the Cambodian genocide. I focus on four sites: the Cambodian American Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial in Chicago, Illinois; Cambodian Cultural Museum and Killing Fields Memorial in Seattle, Washington; the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and the Killing Fields at Choeung Ek in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. From 1975 and 1979, the Khmer Rouge Regime used Tuol Sleng, formerly Tuol Svay Prey High School, as an interrogation, torture, and execution site. Today, the prison has been transformed into a museum but preserved just as the Democratic Kampuchea left the facilities in 1979. In many ways, this original museum in Cambodia serves as a model for other “museumifications” of the Cambodian genocide. It also shares a great deal with other such sites of torture and execution, which have become “tourist destinations” and museums globally. Technically, Tuol Sleng (and other museums like it) has an ambiguous status as a museum per se: it is not only an open grave for national mourning, but also a site of atrocity; not only a site of atrocity, but also an archive; not only a holding place for history, but also a memorial; not only a memorial, but also a museum. What is the significance and implications of changing this slaughterhouse into a historical preservation site? What kinds of cultural memory is this museum transmitting? How can a study of this site and its use in educating subsequent generations help us reflect on the role of other such museums?

This paper explores the ways in which such ambiguous museums participate in the complex process of cultural memory creation.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Colin Lim is a native southern Californian. After graduating from high school, he moved to the Northeast to attend college. He graduated with a Bachelor of Science in Hotel and Restaurant Administration from Cornell University in 2007 and went on to pursue a Master of Arts in Asian Studies also at Cornell University. When he is not busy reading and/or writing for school or playing with his puppy, Colin enjoys training for triathlons, playing his violin, and singing in the Cornell Glee Club.

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INTRODUCTION

As immigrants from Cambodia, my parents find recounting their life during the Pol Pot regime and their escape from the People's Republic of Kampuchea difficult. The few instances when they did share stories with me were times when I was scolded. Whenever I did not finish my food, they would sternly say to me, "During Pol Pot, I ate everything I was given. Otherwise, I would have starved. You're lucky you've never experienced hunger." Whenever I refused to do a chore, like washing dishes or taking out the trash, they would say to me, "If I didn't do as I was told during Pol Pot, I would have been taken aside and beaten to death." Even though their experience seemed anachronistic and far stretched to me, I still accepted their stories as truth. Many young people from the small villages of *Chamkar Leu* in the Kampong Cham Province to the capital city of Phnom Penh or even the Cambodian diasporas that stretch from Long Beach, California to Lowell, Massachusetts in the United States heard similar retellings. However, unlike these kids, I have never had to do strenuous chores like reaping a field. From my field research, I discovered that a significant number of them reject their parents' and grandparents' testimonies. The stories seem too unfathomable. Instead, they tend to think of them as old wives' tales or myths because parents often do not want to re-experience their painful memories, let alone bequest painful memories to their children.

For the children of survivors, museums can facilitate their acceptance and understanding of the genocide. This Master's thesis, which was originally a written version of an oral version presented at the Inclusive Museum Conference in 2008, presents memorial-museums a method of

intergenerational communication of cultural memory, or more specifically, the memory of atrocity. In this thesis, I will focus on the role of genocide memorial-museums in assisting the validation and transmission of experiences too difficult to revisit. I will examine four Cambodian genocide memorial museums: the Cambodian American Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial in Chicago, Illinois; the Cultural Museum and Killing Fields Memorial, Seattle, Washington; the Tuol Sleng Genocidal Center in Phnom Penh, Cambodia; and the Killing Fields at Choeung Ek in Phnom Penh, Cambodia. For the readers of this thesis, please allow me to summarize the life of Pol Pot and the conditions for the ascension of the Khmer Rouge regime. I will then proceed to discuss some theoretical perspectives to help readers get into the mind of Pol Pot and his cadres. Finally, I will introduce my methodology, present you with the four memorial-museums that I surveyed, give you the ethnography of museums as mediums for intergenerational communication, and present you with my conclusion.

CHAPTER 1

SALOTH SÂR BECOMING POL POT

Prior to becoming the person the world knows him as today, Pol Pot's birth name is Saloth Sâr. He chose the pseudonym Pol Pot to make himself seem more Khmer and more peasant-like. His family name, Sâr (translates: the color white), refers to his genetically fairer skin pigmentation, which also establishes him as a product of a Sino-Khmer marriage – specifically, Chinese and Khmer (Short 2004, 18). Native Khmers in Cambodia typically exhibited dark skin pigmentations. Furthermore, during this time period, Native Khmers loathed the Chinese. By changing his name, not only did he erase his Chinese ethnicity, but he also erased his past privileges in order to appeal to the common Cambodian folk. In this section, I will discuss his privileges as follows: his family origins, his formative years amongst the elite in Phnom Penh, and his education.

Family Origins

Born in the village of Prek Sbauv, in the province of Kompong Thom, approximately ninety miles north of Phnom Penh, Loth (Saloth Sâr's father) raised his family in the countryside. He was considered wealthy within the peasant class by local standard. His farm produced more than adequate amounts of rice for the family with a good surplus that enabled him to acquire fifty acres of rice-paddy field. During the harvesting seasons, Loth hired poorer neighbors to help with farming. He also owned a tiled-roof house on traditional Cambodian stilts, which was uncommon for peasants during those days. He even own livestock in the form of several draft cattle, which was also considered a status symbol. In terms of religious

tradition, the family practiced Khmer Buddhism. Even though they were Sino-Khmers, they did not observe nor perform any Chinese traditions. Aside from the family's genetically fairer skin and tiled roof, they epitomized colonial Khmer peasant life. (Chandler 2000, 8) (Short 2004)

Royal Connections

Even though his family stemmed from the peasantry, Loth and his family received favors from the provincial governor, Dekchoa Y. Dekchoa helped Loth's sister, Cheng, receive a post in King Norodom's household. Cheng's daughter, Meak, became a consort in the royal harem to heir apparent Prince Monivong. When Prince Monivong became king, he appointed her as the Head of Royal Bedchamber, giving Meak the highest post within the royal harem and responsibility over all the Ladies in the palace. In 1930, Meak helped Loth's oldest son, Suong, secure an appointment as a palace officer. She also pulled Suong's younger sister, Roeung, into the royal harem. Roeung eventually became King Monivong's favorite consort. (Short 2004, 16-17)

Education

The economic situation in Prek Sbauv became worse, forcing Loth to send Saloth Sâr to live with Suong. The family decided to delay Saloth Sâr's primary school education by enrolling him at Wat Botum Vaddei to expose him to more Khmer culture and to fulfill his religious obligation as a novice¹ (Short 2004, 23). Strategically, the royal court favored Wat Botum Vaddei of the Thommayut order² – known for strict canonical practices. Although the

¹ Novice ordination was part of the Khmer male rite of passage.

² When Prince Mongkut initially lost his title to the Siamese throne to his half-brother, Jessadabodindra (King Rama III), he entered the monkhood at Wat Mahathat in 1824. To his dismay, he found "meditation and ascetic practices (*vispassaradbura*) uninformed by learning (*ganthadbura*)" and that that "his teachers could

majority of his fellow novices came from the countryside, a significant minority came from the aristocracy of Cambodia. David Chandler suggests that Sâr's experience in the temple exposed him to more Khmers and Khmer culture than any other point in Sâr's life. (Chandler 2000, 9)

After completing his novice training, Suong enrolled him in *École Miche*, a Catholic school ran by French and Vietnamese Catholic fathers in Phnom Penh. Although the protectorate schools would have allowed him to socialize with children from European families and more affluent Khmer families, the Catholic school was more affordable. Towards the end of his tenure at the Catholic school, he failed the *Certificat d'Etudes Primaires Complémentaires* but secured a spot at the College Preah Sihanouk in the province of Kompong Cham, fifteen miles northeast of Phnom Penh in 1953. He passed his examinations in 1947 and received admission to attend Lycée Sisowath, an exclusive high school in Phnom Penh. (Short 2004, 23-36) Consistently throughout his education, students from privileged families surrounded him. In 1948, he failed his upper class admittance examination, forcing him to attend *École Technique* at Russey Keo in the northern suburbs of Phnom Penh where he studied carpentry (Chandler 1999, 21). Prior to his

not provide him with the doctrinal and canonical explanations for the practices they taught" (Tambiah 1976, 209). He discovered that many rules within the Vinaya were ignored, people had too much faith in myths and superstition, and that monks had no meditate discipline. Furthermore during this time, Christianity was spreading through Thailand quickly, so he also wanted to "modernize [Buddhism] in order to contain Western powers" (Forest 2008, 25). He immediately went to Wat Bowonniwet to pursue his own scholarship and eventually proved himself a scholar. King Rama III later appointed him abbot of Wat Bowonniwet in 1836 (Tambiah 1976, 209). In this process of becoming a devote Buddhist monk and scholar, he founded the Thommayut order (translates: "those adhering to the law" (Vella 1947, 39)) with "direct influence [from] Christian practice[s]" (Vella 1947, 41) and forced every monk to aligned strictly to the rules and laws within the Vinaya cannon. Through this Buddhist reformation, he expunged the sangha of lazy monks and taught them to think on their own. For this reason, monks from the Thommayut order suffered greater persecution than monks from the Mahanikay order during the reign of Democratic Kampuchea (Harris 2005, 213). After King Rama III died in 1951, he assumed the throne, which further secured the Thommayut order and made Wat Bowonniwet the favorite amongst the Siamese nobility and elite. Like himself, all of his sons as well as Prince Norodom and Prince Sisowath were ordained at Wat Bowonniwet (Tambiah 1976, 214).

admittance at the technical school, teachers knew Solath Sâr as a mediocre student. Even at the technical school, the student body consisted of young adults from privileged families. He managed to turn himself around and received a scholarship to study radioelectricity at the *École d'Ingénieurs des Technologies de l'Information et du Management* (the Engineering School of Information Technologies and Management) in Paris, France (Short 2004, 48).

While in Paris, Solath Sâr enjoyed himself. He lost interest in school and neglected his coursework, causing him to fail his second-year examination. The French education system allowed him to stay another year to retake the exam. His membership in the secret society called the *Cercle Marxiste*, whose members consisted of over half the Cambodian students in Paris, and fascination over Marxist ideology took him further away from his studies. He even joined the French Communist Party to entrench himself in more of Karl Marx's works. After he failed his second-year exam a second time, the government closed his bursary account. On December 15, 1952, he left France and arrived in Cambodia in January 1953. He immediately established the first Khmer communist group, the Khmer People's Revolution Party. He remained low-key while serving as a French literature and history teacher at Chamroan Vichea, a private college near his old home in the village of Boeung Keng Kâng in the province of Kompong Thom. (Short 2004)

CHAPTER 2

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY

Many conditions led to Cambodia's inability to move towards complete political and economic independence. In the following section, I will attempt to give you a glimpse of the complexity that led Cambodia to become a war-torn state. In this section, I will discuss Cambodia's independence from France, the United States involvement in Southeast Asia with regards to the Cold War, the coup d'état of Prince Norodom Sihanouk, the Lon Nol reign, the protests in America over the extension of the Vietnam War into Cambodia, the Cornell University participation, the Khmer Rouge ascent, the Cham Involvement, the Vietnamese protectorate, and the formation of the democratic government.

Independence from France

For centuries, Siam had encroached onto Cambodian territory. Desperate for military support, King Duang requested French military protection against the Siamese in 1863. As time progressed, French protection expanded into French colonialization. While some Cambodian monarchs enjoyed the protectorate, others loathed but tolerated it. Given that the majority of Khmers in Cambodia resided in rural areas, many people were apathetic to French rule. However, educated people, specifically monks and former monks, held nationalist sentiments, which influenced Prince Norodom Sihanouk. The prince immediately campaigned for Cambodian's independence, meanwhile courting Japan for military assistance between 1941 and 1945. In the 1954 Geneva Convention, Cambodia gained full independence and sovereignty from France and pressed for Cambodia's

neutrality regarding the American activity in Vietnam. Scholars regarded Cambodia as a Japanese protectorate during this time period. As the American activity in Vietnam expanded into the Vietnam War, the Prince refused to allow the United States airport and airspace privileges in Cambodian territory. This act caused the United States to regard the Prince as a North Vietnamese sympathizer, which meant the United States purposefully neglected support of His Royal Majesty.

Cold War

To stop the spread of communism into Southeast Asia, the United States unintentionally dragged Cambodia into the Cold War. During the United States – Vietnam War, the Viet Cong entered into Cambodian territory through the Ho Chi Minh Trail to supply logistics to forces in South Vietnam. To try to cut off this supply trail through Cambodia, Nixon ordered aerial bombing campaigns along the trail and along the Cambodian-Vietnam border. Prince Norodom Sihanouk naturally protested against the bombings as well as other border incursions. The initial aerial bombs scattered Viet Cong camps but scattered them into Cambodian territory. By the early 1970's, aerial bombs sent the Viet Cong deeper into Cambodia, allowing the Vietnamese communist to control one-third of the country (Herring 2001). Nixon continued to bomb Cambodia until Congress legislated in 1973 to stop the campaign. By 1975, they gained control over most of Cambodia.

Coup D'état

In March 1970, Lon Nol, Prince Sihanouk's Defense Minister, and Sisowath Sirik Matak performed a coup d'état while the Prince left

Cambodia for medical treatment in France. Upon recovery, the Prince went into exile and operated the *Gouvernement Royal d'Union Nationale du Kampuchéa* (Royal Government of National Union of Kampuchea) in Beijing, China. He adamantly believed that the United States, particularly the Central Intelligence Agency, conspired the coup. Henry Kissinger, the Secretary of State during the Richard Nixon administration, met with the Prince in 1979 in Beijing to assure him of the United States noninvolvement. Scholars constantly debate whether the United States actually played a role in the coup but a consensus amongst academics acknowledges that the United States knew of the coup before it happened (Chandler 1991) (Clymer 2004) (Kiernan 2002).

Lon Nol Reign

Although the United States may have publically denied their involvement in Prince Sihanouk's coup d'état, they supported the Lon Nol – Sirik Matak regime with arms and supplies. They hired Khmer Krom, ethnic Cambodians living in Vietnam, as mercenaries to fight for the Cambodian government. They used foreign relations with Indonesia to secure Khmer military training and Thailand for additional military troops support (Clymer 2004). During the Lon Nol reign, Congress appropriated hundreds of millions of U.S. dollars annually, amounting to billions of U.S. dollars, to the Cambodian Military Assistance Program.

American Protest

When Nixon ordered American soldiers to assist South Vietnamese troops with the invasion of Cambodia on April 30, 1970, Americans at home in the U.S. protested against the campaign on college campuses and on

Capital Hill. Students held demonstrations on college and university campuses across the United States. On May 4, National Guardsmen killed four student demonstrators at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio. Over 150,000 protesters, as a reaction, coalesced in front of the White House on May 9. This scared Nixon into ordering the military to sit on the White House roof armed with machine guns to protect himself, Henry Kissinger, and the rest of his cabinet. On May 14, police officers murdered two African-American students at Jackson State University in Jackson, Mississippi. Congress intervened with the Supplemental Foreign Assistance Appropriations Act of 1973 to pull all military assistance from Cambodia. This act led to Senator Jacob Javits's War Powers Act of 1973, which required Congressional consultation to declare war. (Urofsky 2002)

Cornell Participation

In a response to the United State's National Guard's massacre at Kent State University, Cornell University students a called for a national strike at universities and on Capital Hill. The strike's objectives included the following three points:

that the U.S. end systematic oppression and release political prisoners, such as Black Panther leaders // that the U.S. government withdraw all forces from Southeast Asia immediately // that universities end their complicity with the war effort by ending defense research, ROTC, and other programs (Bengelsdorf 1970, under "Groups Call For National Strike").

Historically, many people knew of the United States' military campaign in Southeast Asia but did not take the campaign seriously. When the Vietnam War began straining the supply of volunteer military men and when Nixon order a draft, Cornell students as well as other students across the nation

began demonstrating against the campaign. At the university campus, eight thousand students, faculty, administrators, and staff even coalesced in Barton Hall to discuss a boycott. One professor, Peter C. Steins from the Department of Physics, recommended that two to three thousand students charter busses to go to Washington, D.C. to participate in the national strike. Professor George McTurnan Kahin from the Department of Government egged students further by telling them that the strike would put pressure on Congress (Bengelsdorf 1970, under “Barton hall Crowd Calls Strike; Deans Say Classes to Be Held”).

Faculty was also eager to assist student in this demonstration. Two days after the declaration of a national strike and the Cornell community’s intention to participation in the strike, the faculty convened and decided to provide students with grading options for missing class. They drafted the proposal to unify all faculties’ position on grading – specifically to minimize student disagreements. University President Dale R. Corson³ refused (to his dismay) to allow students to strike. The faculty subverted Corson’s request when they ratified the new grading policy (Mills 1970, under “Faculty Approves Grade Options”). Students quickly formulated the Cornell Vietnam Mobilization Committee, which oversaw the three thousand plus students striking on Capital Hill. Some faculty even donated money to help cover student expenses. Locally, students from Ithaca College joined Cornell students in a parade around the arts quad chanting, “On Strike, shut it down” (Bengelsdorf 1970, under “Campus Strikers Mobilize”).

³ University President Dale R. Corson had received a nomination from the Nixon administration to join the United States Supreme Court but failed for confirmation in the Senate. We can speculate that he did not want to jeopardize his relationship with the Nixon administration by allowing Cornell students to strike.

Because the communists had infiltrated most of Cambodia by the time the Cornell Daily Sun articles published, students' activism exacerbated issues by persuading Congress to release the communist tigers to Cambodians, a release that fueled the genocide. These instances of activism depict students as heroic figures. However, students also acted as self-centered individuals protecting themselves from the draft by protesting – thus implicating themselves indirectly in the Cambodian genocide.

Phnom Penh Takeover

The fall of Phnom Penh to the Khmer Rouge – more or less – came after the Americans fled Cambodia. Bounded by the War Powers Act and rebuffed by Congress, President Gerald Ford could not invest anymore American tax dollars in Cambodia. Initially, Khmer Rouge forces stifled Phnom Penh by closing off all roads to the city, mined the riverine passes, and bombed airstrips to slowdown/prevent airlifts from supplying food and ammunition to Phnom Penh. At this time, Phnom Penh became both a safe haven and a prison for two million Cambodians. On April 1, 1975, under clear orders from Japan and the ASEAN states, as well as Ambassador John Gunther Dean, Marshal Lon Nol and his family left Cambodia⁴ for an informal pit stop to Indonesia and a final stop in Hawaii for medical treatment (Clymer 2004, 98) (Chandler 1991, 234). The Khmer Rouge had held off closing Pochentong airport in anticipation of an American departure. On April 10th, 1975, 36 Chinook and Sikorsky helicopters carrying 360 marines left the Gulf of Thailand to airlift all American embassy staff

⁴ Various reports indicate that Lon Nol received a gift in an amount that ranged from \$200,000 to \$1 million dollars from the Cambodian treasury (infused by the US government) and named a national hero for vacating the country (Kamm 1998, 118) (Clymer 2004, 98-99) (Chandler 1991, 234).

and foreigners out of Cambodia, which accounted for a total of 82 American citizens, 159 Cambodians, and 35 other nationalities. (Neveu 2009, 29) (Clymer 2004, 100-101)

When the Khmer Rouge breached the city on April 17th, 1975, Lon Nol government soldiers and Khmer Rouge soldiers who grew up in the same villages embraced each other as the war was finally over. Torrents of Khmer Rouge soldiers slowly entered into the capital city with special orders from the Central Committee to evacuate everyone. Khmer Rouge soldiers rode around in cars ordering/yelling through loud speakers for the inhabitants of Phnom Penh to pack lightly for the countryside because the Americans were going to allegedly bomb the city. As quickly as the Khmer Rouge captured and entered Phnom Penh, the Cambodian people quickly evacuated the city. (Neveu 2009)

Khmer Rouge Ascent

Pol Pot quickly converted the country to an agrarian state. Everyone besides the Khmer Rouge worked in forced-labor farms and projects. In what Michael Vickery refers to as the “Standard Total View” of the Democratic Kampuchea reign, the Khmer Rouge detained and killed intellectuals, professionals (e.g. doctors, lawyers, school teachers), foreigners, and people who worked for the former government and military. Even people who wore glasses were at risk of being flagged and executed as intellectuals. Vickery, with the most conservative academic estimates, believes 750,000 people died during the Pol Pot Regime (Vickery 1984, 187). The Yale Genocide Program, with the most liberal academic estimates, believes 1.7 million people died (Yale Genocide 2008). Ironically from a peasant

family (with royal connections) who also has never held a reaper in his life and an intellect who received a scholarship to study radio-electricity in France, Pol Pot joined the French Communist Party after being fascinated with Marxist ideology (Kiernan 1996, 10). In his four-year attempt to establish a classless society ran by proletariats, Pol Pot also eradicated much of the Khmer people's culturally rich heritage.

Purging Cham Islam

Not many people are aware that a genocide, by its actual definition, actually occurred in Cambodia. Within the academic community, the use of the word, “genocide,” to describe Pol Pot’s reign and mass murder over Cambodia between 1975 and 1979 is a hot debate. Many scholars do not feel that the word “genocide” accurately portrays the mass killings. MSN’s Encarta defines genocide as the “murder of entire ethnic group: the systematic killing of all the people from a national, ethnic, or religious group, or an attempt to do this” (MSN Encarta – Dictionary: genocide). Scholars feel that this definition does not fit the circumstances of Cambodia. The Khmer people were no different to the Khmer Rouge. They were the same people. Anyone and everyone had the opportunity to join the Khmer Rouge revolutionary forces. As such, genocide does not accurately describe the Khmer situation. Scholars then formed the word “autogenocide,” and defined that word as “killing of fellow citizens: the extermination of people by members of their own society” (MSN Encarta – Dictionary: autogenocide). Yet, with these two words in play, one may come to realize that an actual genocide did occur in the midst of the

autogenocide – specifically, the Cham Genocide. While the Khmer Rouge was killing ethnic Khmers (especially those from privileged backgrounds), they were specifically on an ethnic cleansing campaign to wipe out the Cham ethnic minority.

The purpose of this subsection is to discuss the Khmer Rouge's use of the Cham as a social laboratory. In this section, I will provide you with a brief history of the Cham people, a discussion of the treatment of the Cham during the Democratic Kampuchea reign over Cambodia between 1975 and 1979, and an exploration of the theoretical framework that drove Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge to insanity.

Brief Cham History

Like other Hindu-Buddhist Southeast Asian ethnicities, the Cham people initially dominated the Southeast Asian peninsula as clans in present day Vietnam. Lowland Chams and highland Chams maintained correspondence with each other through trading routes. As trade developed and wealth entered into the area, they eventually became federalized into a kingdom known as Champa during the second century *anno domini*. As they began to expand, they established a naval force to protect their ports while attracting traders from Europe and the Middle East within the Southeast Asian peninsula. The Vietnamese began taking over Cham territory by passive means, as “the displacement process was not necessarily always a violent struggle so much as outwitting the earlier [Cham] inhabitants” (Collins 2009, 13). With wealth as an interest to the

Khmers of Angkor⁵ and to the Vietnamese, they eventually engaged the Cham in a series of battles that crippled the Champa Kingdom and forced the Cham to relocate to an area north of Phnom Penh, Cambodia known as Kompong Cham – especially in areas along water sources where fish became a primary source of food and trade.⁶

The Cham people's conversion to Islam is of much debate to scholars. Some argue that the "Muslim Malay residents of Cambodia were responsible for converting the new Cham arrivals" (Collins 2009, 22) during their relocation process. Others argue that maritime Muslim traders began converting Cham port cities during the magnificent days of the Champa Kingdom. Nonetheless, the Malay presence in Cambodia helped transition the Cham immigrants of Champa.

Like all other ethnic minorities in Cambodia, the Cham relations with Khmers is mixed. Many ethnic Khmers liken the Cham to the Chinese for their capitalist attitude and success; however, the Khmers are very accepting of the Cham community. The dominant language in some villages is Khmer, while in other villages, the majority speaks the traditional Cham language with Malayo-Polynesian influences. Islam canonical laws forbid the marriage of Muslims to non-Muslims but interracial marriages between Khmers, Vietnamese, and Chinese occurred frequently, resulting in the non-Muslim partner converting to Islam (Kiernan 2002, 256).

⁵ The Cham have always had good relations with the Khmers. In ancient folklore and history, a Cham prince gained the trust of an Angkorian king who allowed the prince to command his military forces for him.

⁶ To this day, the Cham are known for their skills in fishing and have managed to dominate the fish trade.

Cham During Democratic Kampuchea

When the Communist Party of Vietnam and other Communist Parties had influence over the Khmer Rouge, the Communist Party of Kampuchea practiced ethnic and religious tolerance. When the Communist Party of China began to guide Pol Pot in his vision of utopia, the Khmer Rouge began to take an aggressive stance on assimilation. In the following section, I will discuss how initially the Cham people were treated benevolently, how their community was the pilot program for the Khmer Rouge agrarian state, how the Cham eventually became a threat to the communist vision, various resistance factors that caused the Cham people to rebel, and an actual instance of a Cham rebellion.

Benevolent Treatment

The Cham people were not always a threat to the communists. Communist doctrines did not preach ethnic cleansing of minorities. At one point, the communists heavily recruited the Cham people to participate in the revolution. One man, Man Sos,⁷ even rose up into the military ranks of the communists. Kiernan recorded a Cham testimony that depicted the Khmer Rouge as gentle human beings during the genocide, saying that “They still treated us well, let us work and fend for

⁷ Man Sos is a welcoming and esteemed figure in the Cham community. While in service to the communists, he studied at the Tay Nguyen guerrilla warfare school in Vietnam and studied politics in Moscow and Beijing (Kiernan 1996, 258). In 1970, the communists appointed him to conduct Cham Muslim affairs. Through his efforts, he convinced the communists to appoint Islamic leaders to the party as community leaders and not just village chairmen. However, in 1973, the party’s attitude changed towards the Cham Muslims and Sos Man was arrested and executed.

ourselves... “They helped us a lot... like fathers and sons,””⁸ (Kiernan, 1996, 258-9).

Pilot Programming

Prior to implementing the idealized agrarian state of Pol Pot, the communists’ used the Cham community as a testing ground for solidarity groups and cooperatives. In 1970, the communists initially transformed the Cham community into solidarity groups consisting of ten to fifteen families. Large Cham communities were subdivided into smaller solidarity groups. The communist took land from wealthy families through eminent domain and redistributed it to solidarity groups that lacked land. Subdistrict chairmen (appointed by the government and not the people) recommended and appointed new village chairmen who were “the poorest and the least educated” (Osman 2009, 6). The solidarity group granted members with the right to private property but forced everyone to participate in farming. By the end of the season, the rice harvest was poor. The system allowed members to work the bare minimum. No one had interest in cultivating the crops like the old system in which wealthy landowners could hire or barter labor.

In 1973, solidarity groups were converted into cooperatives. Solidarity groups merged with one another to form cooperatives that consisted of approximately twenty-five families. Membership into the cooperative required all individuals to give up all personal property. The village chairman initially housed all of the rice harvest and allocated 200

⁸ Khmer Rouge treatment of comrades was inconsistent all throughout Cambodia. In certain regions, the Khmer Rouge slaughtered people ruthlessly while in other regions, the Khmer Rouge constantly reaffirmed the respondent’s testimony.

grams of rice to each person everyday. In 1974, the cooperatives combined to consist of at least fifty families, then 120 families. Eventually, cooperatives merged to create subdistrict cooperatives that consisted of “700-800 and up to 1,000 families”⁹ (Osman 2009, 11). Since the onset, members within the cooperatives disliked the system. Some families had more able-bodied workers (who required more calories to be productive) than other families that had small babies and children but received equal amount of food.

System Threat

The communist party eventually saw the Chams as a potential threat to their own polity. They forced the whole country to assimilate into the communist culture by eliminating religion and language. In a decree sent to the provinces, the Khmer Rouge declared that,

*There is one Kampuchean revolution. In Kampuchea there is one nation, and one language, the Khmer language. From now on the various nationalities do not exist any longer in Kampuchea. Therefore individuals must change their names by taking new ones similar to Khmer names. The Cham mentality are abolished. Those who do not abide by this order will reap all consequences*¹⁰ (Hawk 1987, 127 - 128).

While the Cham people have always been on Party leaders’ consciousness, their existence became an explicit thought when party leaders noticed that the Cham people refused to let go of their religion.

⁹ When Pol Pot proposed to expand cooperatives into “liberated areas,” some party leaders opposed the idea. Particularly, Hou Yuon opposed the proposal because he had overseen its implementation since inception and knew of its logistical problems. Shortly after his public disapproval of the proposal in 1975, Hou Yuon was executed.

¹⁰ Not only did the Khmer Rouge demand that they were not allowed to practice their religion, but they also demanded that they raise and eat pork. Many Chams who had joined the Communist Party of Kampuchea initially joined because they wanted to participate in positions of power after victory (the capture of Phnom Penh) but found that they were disarmed and their religion abolished.

Party leaders felt that religion facilitated the capitalistic class system. Religion of any kind, including Buddhism, would hinder comrades from being materialistically free. Hence, Islam became a political threat to their own party's polity. In the following story that Father François Ponchaud collected during his missionary years as a Catholic priest before he was forced to leave Cambodia, he highlights the value of Islam onto the Cham people:

One night the sons came home to visit their father and told him about their exploits – how they had killed Khmers, eaten pork, and liberated the country. “Come with us,” they told him, “and follow the revolution.” The old man didn’t say a word but went out of the house; he came back armed with a cleaver and killed both his sons. He covered their bodies with a big cloth and then went to tell his neighbours: “Come and see the two enemies I’ve killed!”

When he pulled back the cover his friends said, “But those are your sons!” “No they’re not,” he retorted, “they are enemies to our people and our religion and so I killed them.” He told his story and everybody said he had done right, and they decided to kill all the Khmer Rouge in the village. They did it that night. (Ponchaud 1978, 153-4)

Historically, the people of Islam have always had to fight for religious freedom. To strip away their religion is to strip away their identity. Their rituals and practices are intended to remind themselves of the endurance of their people and faith. While the Cham people are known for their tolerance of other religions, the aforementioned story depicts the story of two sons who betrayed their father, religion, and culture by breeching values that their father have strove so hard to instill in them.

Resistance Factors

To the peasant class, the village as a wholistic entity governs interpersonal relations and dynamics. Ebihara, while collecting data in

the field, noticed that “informal mechanisms of social control, such as gossip and ostracism, do more to keep people in line than recourse to police or law courts... villagers tend to shun the latter” (Ebihara 2006, 370). No one trusted government appointed officials. In fact, appointed officials consulted village chairmen. Even when the Khmer Rouge had full control over Cambodia between 1975 through 1979, village chairmen held more authority than some cadres. El Him, accounts from his experience in prison that “once a significant number of Khmer were arrested and sent [to prison], but their village chairman came to vouch for them and they were released. Only the Khmer with high-level lifestyles were not guaranteed by their village chairmen” (Osman 2006, 26). If the village chairman had no control over a situation, then the village controlled the situation, as “quarrels within a village or between neighboring villages were settled by conciliation rather than by law, and often smoldered on for years” (Chandler 2008, 125).

Villagers also took care of each other. Whenever anyone was sick or injured, the village took over the household of the sick and injured person until they were well enough to regain control over their household. In the extreme case, villagers protected one another. In the Cham village of Koh Phal, three Cham villagers were summoned to a local security office for committing traitorous acts and were invited to openly admit their charges. Twenty-two other villagers accompanied the three plaintiffs and “swore together that they would ‘confess’ to nothing and they pleaded to fight, if need be, even to the death. When the group arrived... the Khmer Rouge did not convene a public meeting... nor did they tell the three accused to confess” (Osman 2006, 54). All of the

villagers arrived home safely but the Khmer Rouge arrested all twenty-one villagers and the plaintiffs several days later. While villagers could not anticipate/predict the arrests, these community behaviors were typical. Everyone saw one another every day. Everyone knew everything about one another. Village gossip was regarded as village fact. As such, everyone would then vouch for one another in the event of danger because everyone knew the truth.

While class systems may have existed in the Cham community, everyone was still seen as equals. The Cham's class system operated much like Leach's classic observation of the highland people of Burma in that,

Within any one domain there is no substantial difference in standard of living between the aristocrats and the commoners - members of both classes eat the same food, wear the same clothes, practise the same skills. Master and slave live in the same house under almost the same conditions (Leach 2004, 162).

Like their fellow Islamic brothers and sisters in North America, Middle East, and the rest of the world, the Cham community cherished one another and helped each other out. This fraternal-like network kept their polity strong and alive. As such, when the Khmer Rouge attempted to convert them, they resisted.

Total Rebellion

The Khmer Rouge first started to instigate hostilities to the village of Koh Phal within the Kompong Cham province in 1973. Khmer Rouge cadres called for the implementation of solidarity groups but the community refused. In 1974, the Khmer Rouge ordered the village chairman to confiscate all Qu'ran in the village but the village chairman

refused. The Cham villagers' felt that passive action was more effective than taking a hostile stance against the Khmer Rouge. However, the Khmer Rouge then ransacked two surao and arrested the village chairman. A year later in 1975, the Khmer Rouge then called for a village meeting during prayer time on Ramadan, which they ordered that forty village elders were to be relocated elsewhere, women to cut their hair and forbidden to cover it, burn all copies of the Qur'an, raise pigs and eat pork, not allowed to pray, close all communal worship places, and only allowed eligible Chams to marry non-Muslims (Osman 2009, 56). Villagers eventually began to walk out of the meeting when the meeting encroached onto their specific times for religious observation. A week later, the Khmer Rouge secured the perimeter of the village with reconnaissance and began to bombard the village with artillery fire. The village people took arms to defend their village but lost after several days of battle. In the end, forty mass graves surround the former village. (Osman 2009, 43-58)

After the incident at Koh Phal and other instances of rebellion in other Cham villages, the Khmer Rouge took a proactive stance by breaking up Cham villages via deportation like the "new people" from large Khmer cities. Unlike the initial meetings in Koh Phal and other rebellious villages, the Khmer Rouge called for meetings in other Cham villages across Cambodia armed with Khmer Rouge soldiers. Osman also noted that he heard from multiple sources that "they warned us not to attempt to do anything, as the villagers of Koh Phal had done" (Osman

2009, 113). By the end of the Khmer Rouge reign over Cambodia in 1979, only 173,000 Chams survived the Khmer Rouge¹¹.

Vietnamese Protectorate

On Monday, June 20th, 1977, Hun Sen, a low ranked Khmer Rouge cadre, fled his post to the jungles and finally defected to Vietnam. On Sunday, December 24th, 1978, General Chu Huy Man led the the Vietnamese invasion into Cambodia to stop the violation of human rights. After capturing Phnom Penh and Kompon Som on Sunday, January 7th, 1979, the Vietnamese established a protectorate over Cambodia. They installed Heng Samrin, a defected Khmer Rouge cadre, as the head of state. Vietnam continued to provide protection and governance over Cambodia until 1993, all the meanwhile, the remaining Khmer Rouge forces continued to wage war against the presiding Cambodian government. (Nguyen-vo 1992)

Democratic Government

The United Nations mediated a peace settlement for Cambodia through the Agreements on the Comprehensive Political Settlement of the Cambodia Conflict, signed on October 23, 1991 in Paris, France between the Khmer Rouge and the presiding government. This peace settlement, in conjunction with the United Nations's Security Council, established the United Nations Transitional Authority for Cambodia (UNTAC) in February 1992. UNTAC's presence helped Cambodia achieve their first democratic election by establishing peace and removing foreign military assistance in 1993. UNTAC provided peace and security in Cambodia and between

¹¹ Kiernan estimates that 250,000 Chams were alive in 1975. This accounts for a loss of one third of the total population. (Kiernan 2003, 588)

political platforms before and after the first national election. UNTAC began its mission with its international civilian and military crew on Monday, March 16th, 1992. (Nguyen-vo 1992) Since the election, Cambodia established a constitutional monarch with a National Assembly.

CHAPTER 2

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

A survey conducted by the Human Rights Center at the University of California – Berkeley concludes that eighty-one percent of Khmers living in Cambodia describes their knowledge of the Khmer Rouge regime as poor to very poor. Sixty-eight percent of those respondents represent people age twenty-nine years old or younger (Pham, et al. 2009, 2). Essentially, those born after the Cambodian genocide have little to no formal knowledge of the genocide. The large majority of those respondents learned about the Cambodian genocide from their parents, grandparents, and relatives. Sadly, the majority of those respondents refer to their kin's testimonies as a cultish hoax. As many oral testimonies tend to exhibit extraordinary circumstances, many young Cambodians refuse to believe that Khmer people can commit atrocious acts towards fellow Khmer people. The same holds true for young Cambodian Americans. However, Cambodian Americans living in the United States who chose to distance themselves from their past have no knowledge of the Cambodian tribunal¹² trying top Khmer Rouge cadres for crimes against humanity. Many Cambodians in Cambodia and the United States accept the conditions of the Khmer Rouge without fully understanding the psychological conditions that allowed Pol Pot to rise to power. They believe in karma, a story about a power hungry prince, a malicious Western country's mission to eliminate communism, et cetera, as the causes of the genocide. In an attempt to understand the Khmer Rouge, this section explores the delusions of the Khmer Rouge leadership and

¹² The formal name of the Cambodian tribunal is the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia but also commonly referred to as the ECCC.

pathologies that haunted the leadership; it uses theoretical language to help readers understand the phantasm that suggests complicity was breached by an imagined community. I will discuss how the Khmer Rouge empowered the unscrupulous, imagined a community, established their existence, punished the collective, delayed the present, asserted their legitimacy, fed the present, and perpetuated paranoia.

Empowering the Unscrupulous

The existence of the Maoist-Khmer form of communism during the Cambodian genocide depended more on a fantasy mapped on reality than an effective execution of communism. Pol Pot and the rest of the Khmer Rouge cadres preyed upon uneducated young peasants as recruits. They proselytized to the peasants who had no interest in ideology by creating a fantasy that only promised, as François Ponchaud contests in his book *Cambodia: Year Zero*, “an age of happiness, which was going to begin immediately after the capture of Phnom Penh” (Ponchaud 1978, 9). This promised fantasy “is not to offer [them] a point of escape from ~~our~~ reality but ~~to~~ offer the social reality itself as an escape from some traumatic, real kernel” (Žižek 1989, 45). Khmer Rouge leaders used xenophobia, or more specifically, Western influences from France and the United States as the kernel.

While many influences encompass Pol Pot’s ideological philosophy of kernel, he relates feudal-capitalism to the kernel. During the Cambodian Civil War, peasants had nothing to gain from the upper crusts of society and the French and Americans but only the fate of hard labor in rice paddy fields. Khmer Rouge leaders used social stratification

as a tool to convince peasants that the rich had been duping them. They wanted the country to return to its glorious days of Angkor when society operated as an agrarian state. Peasants trusted Khmer Rouge leaders who “attest[ed to their] belief because [they] already believe[d]; [they] do not believe because [they] have found sufficient good reasons to believe” (Žižek 1989, 37) because they had nothing better to believe in.¹³ They relied on charismatic intellectuals who knew how to appeal to their desires, for “ideology is not a dreamlike illusion that [they] built to escape insupportable reality” (Žižek 1989, 45) but a “basic dimension [that] is a fantasy-construction which serves as support for [their] ‘reality’ itself: an ‘illusion’ which structures [their] effective, real social relations ... [that] masks some insupportable, real, impossible kernel” (Žižek 1989, 45) – that being primarily social inequality. The empty fantasy of “an age of happiness” fueled young peasants to join the Khmer Rouge – not their understanding and appreciation of Marxist ideology, for the “Khmer Rouge used ignorant people, people who would kill whomever they were told to kill, because stupid people work without thinking” (Ponchaud 1978, 9 and 22) (Osman 2006, 6). When the Khmer Rouge captured Phnom Penh, Ponchaud even suggests that they were incapable of comprehending ideology.

Imagining a Community

Furthermore, before the Vietnamese invasion into Cambodia, much of the Khmer Rouge’s success on recruitment and execution

¹³ This is similar to Claude Lévi-Strauss’s notion of the three complementary aspects in a sorcerer’s efficacy of magical practices, as found in his book, *Structural Anthropology*: Khmer Rouge cadres have to believe in themselves, peasants in the Khmer Rouge have to believe in the Khmer Rouge, and the community of the Khmer Rouge have to believe in the Khmer Rouge (Lévi-Strauss 1963, 168).

depended upon the creation of Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined community." Built solely upon the promise and trust of "an age of happiness," they created "an imagined political community and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign. It is *imagined* because the members of even the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives an image of their community"¹⁴ (Anderson 1991, 6). Many young Khmer peasants and Chams joined the communist party as early as 1950 (Kiernan 2002, 258). Some were driven to join the communist party because their villages had been destroyed in air raids during the America occupation in Vietnam. Their resentment towards the Americans fueled them to join the National United Front of Kampuchea to fight against the Lon Nol regime, who the American government backed. Leading up to the early 1970s, the communist party had been quite tolerant of the Chams too. They had promised everyone a strong national identity backed with equality. Unless a young comrade openly practiced his/her religion in public or self-identified himself or herself, senior Khmer Rouge cadres could not discern the difference between Chams and Khmers.

Benedict Anderson's notion of "imagined community" also applies to the Khmer Rouge's nexus of power. While Khmer Rouge communist philosophy preaches that it has no influence from religion, the Khmer Rouge cadres remain a product of the Khmer culture, which

¹⁴ This notion of "imagined community" could also be said true of the Cham people themselves. They fought and resisted the Khmer Rouge for the future assurance of their religious polity. Mind you, during this time, as much as thirty Cham individuals managed to go on a pilgrimage to Mecca. Many aspire to go and have not met other Muslims. As such, not many Chams will ever meet fellow Muslims outside of Cambodia.

roots itself in the Hindu-Buddhist tradition. According to Alexander Hinton in traditional Hindu-Buddhism belief, power radiates outwardly from an epicenter. In the instance of the Khmer Rouge, they have no center because of *Ângkar*'s¹⁵ clandestine nature. No one knew who *Ângkar* was nor where they were.¹⁶ When anyone asked about *Ângkar*, they commonly heard, "It is everyone; it is you" (Criddle and Mum 1987, 153). This response caused people to constantly live in fear. No one really knew whom he or she could trust. Everyone had to be vigilant about his or her words and actions. This helped facilitate the communist ideology of comradeship, in which "friendship does not keep silence, it is preserved by silence" as "the truth of truth is that the truth is there to protect a friendship that could not resist the truth of its illusions" (Derrida 2005, 53).

Only silence was certain and known. Speaking, as well as acting, was unknown. By being conscious of oneself, one protected oneself and others from each other. Someone would eventually crack and everyone had to become aware of the *pneekmnoah*, which translates as pineapple (fruit) eyes because of its rounded nature and eye-like texture and form covering its skin. *Ângkar* instilled fear into everyone. As such, Alexander Hinton suggests that *Ângkar* "imagined community" is very much liked to that of a mandala "where *mandala* refers not just to a circle, but to an encompassing center circumscribing a field of symbolic space, one that may have such diverse referents as the universe itself, social relations, the political order, psychic integration, the cardinal directions, and

¹⁵ In Khmer, *Ângkar* translates "organization."

¹⁶ Pol Pot continually changed his name during his tenure as party leader, which meant that no one really knew who led the Communist Party of Kampuchea.

Enlightenment" (Hinton 2000, 171). This served as a very potent source of power and control over the public as it appears ubiquitous and was assumed everywhere. During interrogation, people often accused one another of various accusations, leading to a macabre cycle of death.

Establishing Existence

To help perpetuate their ephemeral existence, Ângkar leaders needed two conceptual pillars to help establish discipline and punishment amongst the masses. First, as Slavoj Žižek explains in his book, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, “we all know very well that bureaucracy is not all-powerful, but our ‘effective’ conduct in the presence of bureaucratic machinery is already regulated by a belief in its almightiness” (Žižek 1989, 36). Young peasants and Chams never knew of the identity of their leaders. Even within the ranks of comrades, they only knew of Ângkar, as a behemoth organization that had eyes and ears everywhere. While young peasants served as the executive agent for the Maoist-Khmer communist machine, they themselves, like their non-Khmer Rouge counterparts, needed to remain vigilant to survive. They could trust no one but were too afraid to not trust anyone. They had no choice but to trust Ângkar. They had no option but to always remain vigilant and disciplined to survive. Second, they needed to obey orders, even when orders conflicted with their own moral judgment. Some of these orders required the mass murder of innocent people, regardless of age and kinship. Those who refused to execute orders disappeared over

night.¹⁷ Behooved with the desire to survive, they were forced to make the paradoxical “final choice[s] of evil” whereby they “acquire[d] the status of an ethical hero – that is, of someone who is guided by fundamental principles ‘beyond the pleasure principle’ and not just by the search for pleasure or material gain” (Žižek 1989, 27), but someone who executes orders to maintain the continence of *Ângkar* for the greater good. This is similar to the complicity case in Suharto: “[t]he defense against... superior force is to become known to it, to exit from the anonymity of the *massa* and to be familiar to those who matter... In the face of the confusion of identities, in which ‘massa’ and ‘army’ and ‘army’ and ‘witch’ are conflated, one might be anything” because “people were not sure if they were witches¹⁸ or not” (Siegel 2006, 187). As such, *Ângkar*’s sole existence depended on both the Khmer Rouge and non-Khmer Rouge people’s sense of self-discipline.

Punishing the Collective

When the Khmer Rouge converted the country into an agrarian society, they also turned the country into a prison. Even before they had full reign over Cambodia in 1975, they started building interrogation sites and prisons in Cham villages in 1971 (Osman 2006, 20). They took over multi-level residential houses where they housed the older prisoners on the upper floor and the younger able-bodied prisoners on the lower floor. To accommodate the need for interrogation sessions, they dug 1.5

¹⁷ Khmer Rouge leaders used fear to their advantage. By causing individuals to go missing, the leaders evoked fear and terror within the peasants. As such, peasants could be more easily managed and often self-govern themselves effectively.

¹⁸ Siegel argues that people externalize by accusing others of being witches to deflect themselves from any accusation of being a witch.

meter-deep pits because “more facilities were needed from which the sound of the interrogation would not carry to neighboring areas” (Osman 2006, 20). Granted, the prison itself existed in a temporal vacuum that does not fit well in Western notions of prisons – especially that of Michel Foucault’s conception. *Ângkar* relied on secrecy as their primary source of continence. Because every act against *Ângkar* by both Khmer Rouge and non-Khmer Rouge individuals constituted an act of treason that threatened the life-force of *Ângkar*; every act appeared to result in death, for the “ideal punishment would be transparent to the crime that it punishes; thus, for [those] who contemplates it, it will be infallibly the sign of the crime that it punishes” (Foucault 1995, 105). When an individual thought about stealing a grain of rice or attempted to help rebels against his superiors, he had to weigh the risk of being caught. He would imagine receiving punishment in exchange for death every time he thought of stealing in order to secure his survival. Not only to the uneducated mind of the peasant but to the whole collective of non-Khmer Rouge people, the punishment became a “retribution that the guilty man makes to each of his fellow citizens, for the crime has wronged them all” (Foucault 1995, 109). Everyone has a stake in another man’s action. Everyone served as an eye and/or ear to preserve themselves. However, punishment in itself did not occur in a public setting. Rather, an individual was abducted in the middle of the night – eliciting the unknown that everyone infers as death. This form of punishment “reduce[d] the desire that makes the crime attractive; increase the interest that makes the penalty be feared; reverse the relation of intensities, so that the representation of the penalty and its

disadvantage is more likely than that of the crime and its pleasures” (Foucault 1995, 106). This facilitated a society that relied on hypervigilance for survival while limiting everyone’s ability to express him or herself for fear of the unknown.

Delaying the Present

Even though the country itself served as a prison, Ăngkar, more specifically Pol Pot, needed to establish real discrete prisons to house people who committed treason against him and his organization. In a sense, he felt afraid of privileged people like himself and people who had a strong convictions over their religion. He ordered for the execution of all privileged and religiously pious people. He became preoccupied with the fear that someone could take his grand organization away from him. Because of the uncertain nature of fear, he could not “grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented,” but chose to signify by “deferred presence” (Derrida 1982, 9).

The prison in itself represented a place for delay – a place to signify the present by delaying. He received a feeling of security within the present by the physical act of delaying. The act of sending people to prison allowed him the momentum to be in the present, as “the movement of signification is possible only if each so-called ‘present’ element,” in this case traitor, “is related to something other than itself, thereby keeping within itself the mark of the past element, and ... the mark of its relation to the future element[:] ... what it absolutely is not, not even a past or a future as a modified present” (Derrida 1982, 13). In

this instance, each prisoner represented a modified present. Yet, each living prisoner still represented a threat to Pol Pot.

He needed to ensure somehow the security and life of Ângkar. Because each person signifies a present, he needed to retain their living presence but eliminate their future. Through torture and forced testimonial confessions, he coerced all prisoners to “inscribe in language ... by making [their] speech conform – even in so-called ‘creation,’ or in so-called ‘transgression’ – to the system of the rules of language as a system of difference” (Derrida 1982, 15), which kept a part of them present while physically eliminating them. This delayed the present of each prisoner through his written testimonies. These testimonies serve as a trace: a “relationship to the illeity as to the alterity of a past that never was and can never be lived in the originary or modified form of presence” (Derrida 1976, 70). In a way, the trace is never there. In relation to trace, when a prisoner speaks, he negates the presence of death; in writing his testimony, he brings forth the knowledge of his own death but assures his existence through his writing for he has left a mark of remembrance (Derrida 1976, 71). By keeping the executed prisoners’ testimonies, Pol Pot accounts for their present being and existence but eliminates their future potentiality in his fantasy.

Asserting Legitimacy

While the physical prisons themselves serve as an institution for present being, it also serves as an institution for legitimacy. In seizing control over the country by initially seizing towns and villages, the Khmer Rouge also destroyed documents, as “there could be no law

without the possibility of trace” (Derrida 1976, 93). Documents assert legitimacy and law. As towns and villages used to hold documents, they needed to fill them with Khmer Rouge documents to assert legitimacy and law – hence the creation and/or remodeling of houses and buildings into prisons. These prisons became archives that gave power to *Ângkar* because one can trace its legitimacy through its previous traces (Derrida 1996, 45). These prisons became holding tanks for both prisoners and prisoners’ testimonies. Furthermore, the institution of prisons had the effect of delaying the present, which allowed Pol Pot to feel security by allowing him “access to [a] written sign [that] assure[d] the sacred power of keeping existence operative within the trace and of knowing the general structure of the universe” (Derrida 1976, 92). Each person who entered into the prison formed a trace. In forming a trace, Pol Pot and Khmer Rouge cadres knew everything about everyone within their controlled micro-universe. Yet, each person represents merely a trace that reasserted the destruction of a potential future, while serving as a benign trace of legitimacy.

Feeding the Present

To remain in the present, Pol Pot and *Ângkar* needed to continually feed the prisons. The Khmer Rouge leaders needed to “produce more archive[s], and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future” (Derrida 1996, 67). Many people entered into prisons without knowing what kind of treason they have committed against *Ângkar*. Prison keepers and interrogators coerced prisoners into confessing to criminal acts that they may not have committed. “If

repetition is thus inscribed at the heart of the future to come, one must also import there, in the same stroke, the death drive” (Derrida 1996, 78), which evokes the necessity of everyone rattling on everyone. People felt compelled to tell on one another to survive. Regardless of the truth of an allegation, Khmer Rouge told on fellow Khmer Rouge and non-Khmer Rouge told on fellow non-Khmer Rouge.

Even between Khmer Rouge cadres themselves, the struggle to gain power in *Ângkar* evoked the death drive between one another. In the instance of the Khmer Rouge, the death drive operate as “the possibility of the ‘second death’, the radical annihilation of the symbolic texture through which the so-called reality is constituted... – not the death of the so-called ‘real object’ in its symbol, but the obliteration of the signifying network itself” (Žižek 1989, 132). The organic nature of the death drive operates to eliminate those who pose as a threat to *Ângkar*, but in actuality, it strives to eliminate all rattlers. Through the prisons, “the possibility of memorization, of repetition, of reproduction, or of reimpression, then ... the repetition compulsion, remains ... indissociable from the death drive ... introducing, a priori, forgetfulness and the archivolithic into the heart of the monument” (Derrida 1996, 11). Through repetition and the momentum of the prison-archive, the act allows Pol Pot to forget about the masses of falsely accused prisoners. The Khmer Rouge cadres themselves could also forget about allegations raised about one another. Yet, the death drive also operates to destroy the archive and the fever of the archive itself: to “‘wipe-out’ of historical tradition opened up by the very process of symbolization/historicization as its radical, self-destructive limit” (Žižek

1989, 136). In killing the accusers of the accused and the accused of the accusers, Pol Pot eliminates their history, which in turn, eliminates their Being. This process also works through itself as an “intervention of the ‘death drive’ as radically non-historical, as the ‘zero degree’ of history” as “the suspension of movement is a key moment of the dialectical process” (Žižek 1989, 144). In the act of killing the accused, the accuser suspends the movement of the killing itself by seeking equilibrium within the agrarian state. The institution of the archive-prisons became a tally marker rather than an archive that Khmer Rouge cadres constantly frequent to consult for research and reference.

Operating to Death

Even at the inception of the Maoist-Khmer communist ideology, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge cadres’ phantasy lacked the ability to sustain itself – let alone survive. Many high level cadres opposed the idea of solidarity groups and cooperatives since the fall of Phnom Penh in 1975. In this sense, they wanted to create a pure agrarian state in which surplus never existed because the existence of surplus means the existence of stratified social classes. They wanted everyone to have equality. They wanted everyone to earn their own life through labor. Žižek suggests that Karl Marx ignores in his own literature when envisioning a socialistic society in the sense that, “‘real socialism’ has rendered possible rapid industrialization, but that as soon as the productive forces have reached a certain level of development... ‘real socialist’ social relations began to constrict further growth” (Žižek 1989, 54). Without further growth, a given society becomes unsustainable.

Granted, a large number of people died during the evacuation of Phnom Penh, but a large number of people also died while providing labor services to Ăngkar during the Khmer Rouge Regime. Ăngkar could not provide people with adequate daily rations of food and nutrition; therefore, it operated to its own death.

Perpetuating Paranoia

People also died due to the lack of the intelligentsia, which included doctors and pharmacists who could have healed people. Pol Pot's paranoia took the better of him when he feared that only fellow intellects could usurp his power. As this is only an ideological phantasy, Žižek does offer a solution out: he specifically states that the "only way to break the power of our ideological dream is to confront the Real of our desire which announces itself in this dream" (Žižek 1989, 48). Perhaps, like Adolf Hitler¹⁹, Saloth Sâr's academic failure on his second-year radioelectricity examination in 1952 at the *École d'Ingénieurs des Technologies de l'Information et du Management* (the Engineering School of Information Technologies and Management) in Paris, France (Short 2004, 82) has a paralleled quality; it became a major factor into the Cambodian genocide. By confronting Pol Pot with his desire to pass his second-year radio-electricity examination or to have actually been accepted amongst the Cambodia intelligentsia in Paris, the circumvention of the Cambodian genocide would have been eminent and 1.7 million lives could have been spared.

¹⁹ Some scholars purported that Adolf Hitler's failure to gain admittance into art school led him to his leadership in the Jewish Holocaust (Morley 2005, 68).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

I based this paper on field research I conducted in the spring of 2008 and 2009. I specifically traveled to Chicago, Illinois in March 2008, Cambodia from March through April 2008 and June through July 2009, and Seattle, Washington in February 2009. Although I have an interview guide (found in the Appendix), I did not adhere to it stringently because I found it too restrictive and would not be able to obtain thick descriptions. I attempted to unpack conversation topics as they came along.

For the Chicago museum, I carried in-depth conversations with the core Cambodian Association of Illinois staff. Specifically, Charles Daas, the museum director, gave me a personal tour of the memorial museum. While on the tour, I had the opportunity to talk about the memorial museum in detail with him. I also had discussions with the Kompha Seth, executive director, and Kaoru Watanabe, the museum librarian over lunch. They provided me with insights into the history of the Cambodian Association of Illinois, as well as other pertinent community initiatives. Few people entered into the memorial museum throughout the day. I attempted to observe them without being too conspicuous. I also engaged them in conversations whenever I could. Because the memorial museum space also serves as a waiting room for members and visitors of the Association, I engaged those people into conversations too.

With regards to the memorial museums in Cambodia, I frequented each site multiple times. I attempted to be inconspicuous by wearing a university student's uniform, which consisted of a buttoned down white

dress shirt, a black or navy blue pair of trousers, and a pair of black shoes. I trailed behind groups and families, listening closely to conversations. When I felt that an opportunity opened for me to intrude into these group and family visits, I engaged them into a discussion about their visit. I also talked to memorial museum guards and tour guides about their experiences while working at the memorial museums and about their thoughts on them. Eventually, they became so familiar with me that they waived towards me whenever they saw me to say hi and called me by name as I passed them.

As for my visit to the Cambodian Cultural Museum and Killing Field Memorial in Seattle, Washington, I visited the old museum site, had lunch with the founder, Dara Duong, and then visited the new site in the Chinatown-International District. I noticed no particular trend of visitors to the museum or any particular visitor to the Cambodian exhibit room. Everyone who visited seemed to have the typical tourist gaze, as borrowed from John Urry. The gaze by which Urry summarizes as “When we ‘go away’ we look at the environment with interest and curiosity... we gaze at what we encounter” (Urry 1990, 1).

CHAPTER 4

CAMBODIAN AMERICAN HERITAGE MUSEUM & KILLING FIELDS MEMORIAL

Since its inception in 1976, the Cambodian Association of Illinois continues to assist Cambodian refugees, new immigrants regardless of nationality and ethnicity, and their children resettle in the greater Chicago area. Most Cambodian immigrants and their families used to live in communities that focused on strong kinship structures and dependencies. The association strives to help them adjust to the new American lifestyle of self-sufficiency and productivity. In 2000, Kompha Seth, the founding director for the Cambodian Association of Illinois, lead the Campaign for Hope and Renewal with the Association to build a \$1.4 million museum complex that would also serve as a Cambodian community center (Elder 2004). The center provides a wealth of resources to the Cambodian community; to name a few of many initiatives, they serve as (but not limited to) a research center, a senior center, an after school activities center, and an adult education center where adults can learn English as a Second Language. Unlike many of the Cambodian Association of Illinois's peer Cambodians associations (such as those in Long Beach, California or Lowell, Massachusetts), the Chicago association hosts the Cambodian American Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial below their office. In the following section, I will discuss the memorial-museum's purpose, the heritage museum, the Killing Fields memorial, the accessibility, the community center, and the target patrons.

Purpose

As the Cambodian Association of Illinois achieved their mission to help Cambodians move on by assimilating them into American culture, they noticed that Cambodians needed more – they needed to be heard. An informant from the neighborhood within the vicinity of the association said, “I remember when the Cambodians came in the early 80’s. I was in the second grade. They sat in my classroom and did not speak a word of English. I’ve become close friends to one of them. She’s very well accomplished... but felt that we never knew...” The association noticed that the Cambodian people in the Chicago community lacked a medium to discuss their experiences to non-Cambodians. Kompha Seth, being the foundation for the Association, heard this need and envisioned a museum for the Cambodian people that would serve a medium for healing. In 2004, the Association opened the doors to the Cambodian American Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial to the public. Since then, they have expanded their scope to help raise awareness of the Cambodian genocide. They wanted other fellow Americans (non-Cambodian) to celebrate their accomplishment for moving on and to renew their Cambodian community and cultural identity.

Heritage Museum

The museum first opened its door to the community with its first traveling exhibit entitled, “The Journey Continues.” Museum staff worked with Judy Ledgerwood, a professor of anthropology at Northern Illinois University in DeKalb, Illinois, to create the first exhibit. It details the lives of refugees fleeing the People’s Republic of Kampuchea through Thailand to

Chicago. On September 7, 2007, the Association featured its second traveling exhibit entitled, “Khmer Spirit: Art & Culture of Cambodia.” The point of the first exhibits shows the world that the Khmer people survived the genocide while the second exhibit highlights the reconstruction and the glory of the Khmer culture. They both strive to depict Cambodians as having moved on with their lives. The Association collaborates regularly with Northern Illinois University to exchange traveling exhibits. They exchanged Northern Illinois University’s current exhibit, “Cambodian Born Anew: Kamnoet Khmae Tmey – A showcase of everyday life in present day Cambodia” with their own in May 2008.

Killing Fields Memorial

On October 7, 2004, the Association also opened its door to the Killing Fields memorial. A huge two-piece wooden arch-shaped wall separates the museum from the memorial. Eighty panes of glass with each pane representing 25,000 victims flank a granite wall. The wall features an etched lotus flower²⁰ in mother-of-pearl with the words, “WE CONTINUE // OUR JOURNEY // WITH // COMPASSION // UNDERSTANDING // AND WISDOM” below it (please refer to Figure 1 on page 45). A small altar with seven candles sits in front of the granite wall with a plaque of its own reading, “KILLING FIELDS MEMORIAL // Dedicated in the memory of over 2 million Cambodians who died during 1975-1979.” Another plaque immediately below it reads, “EACH CANDLE REPRESENTS THOSE WHO DIED EACH DAY OF THE WEEK” (please refer to Figure 2 on page 46). Between the altar and the granite wall is an incense holder, shaped in the form of a lotus

²⁰ The lotus, a divine symbol, lends from Hindu traditions. In the Buddhist tradition, the lotus represents purity, as it floats freely in the muddy water of attachment and desire.

flower. The museum curator even encourages visitors to burn incense for victims. The panes of glass that flake the granite wall has Khmer Rouge victims' names etched on them. The first row of panels closest to the granite wall has victim's names whose families reside in the state of Illinois. Although they initially limited etchings to names of resident Illinois family members, they will etch any Cambodian victim's name for a \$50 donation so the victim will have a space for commemoration.



Figure 1: Killing Fields Memorial

While many Americans welcome such memorials like the Killing Fields Memorial, some Cambodians detest the idea of it. This memorial

marks the only memorial dedicated to victims of the Khmer Rouge in North America. According to the Cambodian Association of Illinois museum director, Charles Frederick Daas, some Cambodians refuse to visit the museum-memorial. He reports that they fear the unrest ghosts from the genocide will haunt them. Some believe that the presence of the memorial itself will attract hungry ghosts to the Chicago area. Clearly, the Killing Fields memorial receives mix reviews from the Cambodian community.



Figure 2: Killing Fields Memorial - Altar

Accessibility

Typically, the association locks the memorial-museum's front doors. Although the museum is open during normal business hours, the association does not have full-time dedicated staff members to guide visitors. They unlock the front doors only on special occasions. Patrons interested in

visiting the museum need to enter the facility through the Association's upstairs office.

Community Center

The Association designed the memorial-museum space strategically as a community center. Even though they host classes and activities upstairs in the offices, people still find their way down to the memorial-museum – especially the elderly, as they tend to make use of the Association's elevator to travel between floors. The elderly also prefers to wait in the memorial-museum space for their children to pick them up. As the Association has been key to developing a strong community of refugees and new immigrants, most Cambodians make use of the many amenities and services offered by the Association, especially the memorial-museum.

Because some people refuse to visit memorial because the thought of ghosts scare them, they also refuse to attend events hosted in the memorial museum space. As the Cambodian cultural center morphs its identity towards more of a memorial, more people may become less inclined to visit the Association altogether. Memorial spaces also have a secularized religious aspect to them – hence the incense burning. As the next generation loses touch with their Cambodian Theravada Buddhist heritage, they also become ambivalent. Memorial spaces serve as a place for mourning loss. Some people prefer not to go to places that make them mourn and become sad, which exacerbates the issue of people becoming ambivalent towards visiting memorial spaces. In this vein of thought, if community members of the Cambodian Association of Illinois continue ambivalence, they will also stop frequenting the community space upstairs.

Target Patrons

Like their Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek counterparts, the Chicago memorial-museum attracts a significant number of non-Cambodians. The target patrons seemed to be mixed. The Association works together with other local associations and museums to draw people in with different exhibit interests, especially with other groups affected by war and genocide. They want to draw as many people into the memorial museum space to raise awareness of the Cambodian genocide with non-Cambodians. While a significant number of Chicagoan received a good education, not many of have heard of the Cambodian genocide. The Association sees their role as educators of the genocide. They partnered with Chicago's Northside College Prep High School to provide teachers with resources and a curriculum about teaching students the Cambodian genocide.

A good number of Cambodians also frequent the museum. In interviews with several community members, Cambodian parents are eager to use the memorial-museum as visual stimuli to share their Pol Pot testimonies with their children. In the last exhibit, "Khmer Spirit: Art & Culture of Cambodia," Khmer parents could use this exhibit to teach their children about the rich Khmer history and culture. Parents could also enrich their children's Cambodian heritage with the upcoming exhibit from NIU, "Cambodian Born Anew: Kamnoet Khmae Tmey – A showcase of everyday life in present day Cambodia." Many families cannot afford to go to Cambodia. Parents can them relate their childhood experiences through this new exhibit.

CHAPTER 5

CAMBODIAN CULTURAL MUSEUM AND KILLING FIELDS MEMORIAL

Prior to opening its door on Friday, May 14th 2004 in the Cambodian diaspora community of White Center²¹ in Seattle, Washington, the Cambodian Cultural Museum and Killing Fields Memorial was housed in Dara Duong's (the founder) garage. The space in White Center was large enough to host social functions and educational programs that included classes, meetings, receptions, and dance shows for both Cambodian Americans and non-Cambodian Americans. However, due to inclement weather and a flood in late 2007, the basement space that was only accessible from the back alley closed its door²². At the time of my site survey, I noticed that a sign installed by the municipal government to indicate the location of the museum was still up. On February 19th, 2008, Duong signed a collaborative agreement²³ with the Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience to house his collection. The Cambodian Cultural Museum and Killing Fields Memorial exhibit was then assimilated into the Wing Luke's permanent exhibit and was inaugurated on Friday, January 18th, 2009. Since the Wing Luke has acquired a portion of his collection, Duong has been working to form a new memorial-museum called the Killing Field Museum in the Cambodian diaspora community of Tacoma, Washington. In

²¹ The former museum's address is 9809 16th Avenue, Seattle, Washington 98106.

²² In a personal interview with Duong, he cited two reasons for relocating artifacts to the Wing Luke: (1) the museum was located next to a porn video store that did not help the image of the museum when school children and families visited and (2) the 2007 flood destroyed a large number of artifacts. (Duong 2009)

²³ Duong contests that he signed a collaborative agreement that would allow him to have some say in the exhibit. However, he believes that the Wing Luke Museum only wanted the exhibit to gain access to grants and funds associated with the Cambodian Cultural Museum and Killing Fields Memorial name. Because the exhibit now belongs to the Wing Luke Museum, he no longer is entitled to funds. (Duong 2009)

the following section, I will discuss the mission of the museum, the founder, the Wing Luke Museum, and the exhibit.

Founder

Dara Duong was born in Battambang, Cambodia in 1971²⁴, four years before Democratic Kampuchea captured Phnom Penh. After escaping the Khmer Rouge regime, he and his family relocated to the Cambodian-Thai border in 1979 and returned to Cambodia in 1991. He studied English in refugee camps, at university, and in Sweden. He worked as human rights and democracy activist upon graduating from university. He then immigrated to the United States in 1999 and became a naturalized citizen in 2004. At the time of this interview, Duong was self-employed, working on several undisclosed projects to finance himself.

Mission

In a casual conversation with Duong over phở, he told me he founded the museum firstly “to explain how fucked-up our kids are,” or more diplomatically put, to give causalities for the non-normative behaviors found amongst Cambodian American youths reconciling their Cambodian and American identities²⁵. Followed by that raw response, he gave three other missions for the museum: (2) to expose the Khmer culture to Americans; (3) to increase humanitarian efforts in Cambodia; and (4) to increase awareness that a genocide had occurred in Cambodia.

²⁴ His legal paper work indicates that he was born in 1968. This is common practice in Cambodian American culture. Immigrants tend to add years to their age to become eligible for retirement early or to subtract years from their age to qualify for high school.

²⁵ Duong was addressing specifically Cambodian American youths from the “1.5” generation and, borrowing from this vocabulary, second generation Cambodian Americans who grew up in Cambodian ghettos in America who have found themselves in trouble: many do not graduate high school and end up in gangs; others have been incarcerated for various crime that range from petty theft to murders.

Wing Luke Museum

The Wing Luke Museum of the Asian Pacific American Experience is located in the Chinatown-International District of Seattle, Washington, just south of downtown. The museum was created to commemorate the memories of Wing Luke who fought for civil rights in the local Seattle area but died in a fatal plane crash in 1965. The museum's overall mission is to share the Asian Pacific American immigrant experience to everyone. The museum now has an affiliation with the Smithsonian Institute to exchange artifacts, exhibits, and programs and to open Smithsonian resources to the Pacific Northwest.

Exhibit

Most of the exhibit that used to be in White Center is now in storage. The Wing Luke Museum has chosen to selectively display only a small fraction of Duong's collection. In a small exhibit room dedicated specifically to the Cambodian genocide within the Community Portrait Galleries on the second floor, the Cambodian Cultural Museum and Killing Field Memorial exhibit is tucked within the Community Portrait Galleries located on the second floor, one can find photocopy of images from S-21 and D.C. Cam, as well as a Khmer Rouge cadre's uniform. Most of the exhibit has Velcro tapped on the back so artifacts can be replaced; however, the museum has no future plans to do so. The exhibit also has a display case that showcases a few Buddhist statues and trinkets. At the time of this ethnographic visit, the downstairs foyer featured a kiosk that looped a 2005 documentary, entitled

Sentenced Home (Grabias et. al. 2007), about Cambodia-Americans who made mistakes during their youth and are being deported²⁶ back to Cambodia.

²⁶ Deportation is now common to Cambodian Americans who did not acquire citizenship during this tenure in the United States. Those who committed small infractions, such as the protagonist in *Sentenced Home*, would normally had been deported upon sentence due to the Antiterrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act (AEDPA) of 1996 and the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act (IIRAIRA) of 1996. However, prior to September 11th, 2001 when the United States government urged Cambodia with the an order from Beijing (Sopheap 2010) to sign a 2002 extradition agreement, the Cambodian government refused to accept deportees; convicted Cambodian Americans only had to serve their sentence in the United States and were not deported.

CHAPTER 6

TUOL SLENG GENOCIDE MEMORIAL

Prior to the Pol Pot Regime, Tuol Sleng (translated: the hill of the poisonous tree) served as a high school. The school had several names: the Lycee Chau Ponhea Yat High School, the Chao Ponhea Yat High School, and the Tuol Svay Prey High School, which is located in the former village (presently a southern suburb of Phnom Penh) called, *Tuol Svay Prey* (translates: the hillock of the wild mango) (Ledgerwood 1997, 83). After the Phnom Penh evacuation in April 1975, the high school that once serviced privileged students in the Phnom Penh and Tuol Svay Prey area laid deserted. In January 1977, the Democratic Kampuchea converted the high school into a prison and execution site, code-named S-21 (Duffy 1994, 49). The “S” in S-21 stood for *sala* (translates: hall) while the number “21” stood for the unit number of the *santebal* (translates: keeper of the peace), the Democratic Kampuchea’s secret police (Chandler 2000, 3). Kang Keck Ieu, alias Duch, sat at the helm of S-21 and interrogated high profiled prisoners. In the following section, I will discuss its use by Angkar, its guidance by the Vietnamese, its target audience, and its layout.

Angkar’s Use

Approximately 18,000 people entered into the gates of Tuol Sleng. The Democratic Kampuchea sent anyone they believed who committed treason against Angkar sent to S-21 for interrogation where they documented confessions and eventually executed people. A mixed number of people entered into the facility daily, ranging from a single person, to a group of people (sometimes families), to a whole truckload. Approximately

four out of five prisoners represented Khmer Rouge supporters, suggesting institutional paranoia. They used interrogation devices such as, “instruments for suspending victims, beds filled with water for water-suffocation, and all the paraphernalia of electrification” (Duffy 2004, 49).

Vietnam’s Guidance

On January 7th 1979, Vietnamese troops drove the Khmer Rouge out of Phnom Penh and dismantled the Democratic Kampuchea government²⁷. On January 8th, two Vietnamese photojournalists followed a scent trail of decomposing bodies onto 133 Street in the southern sector of Tuol Svay Prey where they discovered a barricaded high school. Upon inspection, they realized the atrocities that occurred at the site. The two quickly photo-documented the facility before they reported their findings to the Vietnamese authorities. The Vietnamese immediately cleaned up S-21 within days to show sympathetic foreign visitors illegitimate use of communist ideology. By February/March 1979, they sent Mai Lam, a Vietnamese colonel fluent in Khmer with knowledge in legal studies and museology, to convert the interrogation site into a museum (Chandler 2000).

Mai Lam seemed the best candidate to undertake the archiving and museumification tasks. He had previously organized the Museum of American War Crimes in Ho Chi Minh City. He traveled to Poland to study the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum and to collaborate with East German memorial specialists. He wanted to mimic Holocaust imagery with Tuol Sleng. Specifically, he attempted to reduplicate the Polish Holocaust

²⁷ Although the army of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam was still fighting the People’s Liberation Army (China’s Army), the Vietnamese had already seized control over Phnom Penh and had established Cambodia as a protectorate state. The Chinese eventually retreated on March 5, 1979.

museum's effects of linking the museum with the Nazi regimes but transposing it to Democratic Kampuchea (Williams 2008, 175). He thought this technique would prevent the Khmer people from forgetting what happened to Cambodia under the direction of Pol Pot. Mai Lam wanted to encapsulate the cruelties of the Democratic Kampuchea government in the form of a museum. Under the direction of the Vietnamese authorities, he wanted to deny "the leaders of the [Communist Party of Kampuchea] any socialist credentials and encouraged viewers to make connections between [Democratic Kampuchea] and Tuol Sleng" (Chandler 2000, 5). Mai Lam envisioned the museum as an entity that can help the Cambodian people study the war and, for the more common folks, understand the war crimes (Chandler 2000).

Target Audience

In March 1979, the museum opened its doors to international visitors but banned Cambodian nationals from patronizing the museum. The foreign visitors usually came from Vietnam, the Soviet Union, Laos, Hungary, and Poland. The Communist Party of Vietnam wanted to make Cambodia an example of bad communism. On July 1980, the Vietnamese authorities lifted the ban on Cambodian nationals. Thousands of Cambodians flooded Tuol Sleng, forming long lines onto the street, to search for photographs of family, friends, and relatives. Since the 1993 UNTAC lead election (Chandler 2000), most visitors who visit Tuol Sleng come from Taiwan, Japan, France, Germany, Korea, the United States, and other noncommunist states.

Throughout the day during my visits at Tuol Sleng in April 2008, busload after busload of Europeans entered the facility. Especially since the

Khmer Rouge Genocide Tribunal has recently gained more international news headline, Tuol Sleng, as well as the Killing Fields at Choeung Ek, has received greater attention from tourists visiting Cambodia (please refer to Figure 3). Although Cambodian nationals also frequented the museum, only a sprinkling of them could be seen amongst the crowd of Caucasian faces. Upon entering the museum, patrons were greeted by museum guards. Foreign nationals pay \$3.00 while Cambodian nationals may enter free.



Figure 3: Tuol Sleng Genocide Center - Admissions Booth

Early in the afternoon, I observed a huge flux of primary school and university Khmer students passing their time at S-21 between school lessons. Few dared to venture into the facilities alone; normally, they come in pairs or groups, dressed in black or navy-blue pants/dresses and a white collared shirt. After talking to them, most seemed attracted to S-21 because it is *la'our*

merl, (translates: sensational to look at). Based on interviews, when they turned ten years of age, their parents begin telling them stories about their experience of the Pol Pot Regime. Although few do not initially believe their parents' accounts, they soon do after visiting S-21.

Future

Like the Killing Fields in Choeung Ek, the municipal government wants to hand the future operation and development to an international organization. When the Killing Fields at Choeung Ek became privatized in 2005, rumors spread about Tuol Sleng's privatization. While a South Korean company did approach the Phnom Penh municipal government in the mid-1990s about privatizing Tuol Sleng, nothing have materialized. In 2004, renovations were slated for the genocide memorial-museum but were halted after an outcry over recent projects that had modernized and westernized gallery space and Western-style toilets were installed (Naren 2005).

As the nation's official reminder of the Cambodian genocide, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum has many supporters who oppose any westernization of the museum. However, this has not stopped the municipal government from trying to privatize the museum. Dr. Amareswar Galla²⁸, in a casual conversation in 2008, revealed that the municipal government has tried to outsource development to a Singaporean consultancy to make exhibiting gallery with up-to-date technology. The municipal government had envisioned turning the museum from a pilgrimage site into a tourist destination. Using his influence with the international community, Dr. Galla

²⁸ Dr. Galla serves as Chairperson to the International Councils Of Museums (ICOM) Cross Cultural Taskforce, founding Director of the UNESCO Pacific Asia Observatory for Cultural Diversity in Human Development, and Professor at the University of Queensland.

lobbied various embassies to halt the project. For now, the museum has no immediate plans with the Singaporean consultant agency.

Layout

Visitors start the tour of Tuol Sleng by turning left of the admissions booth where the graves of the final fourteen prisoners greet them. The last fourteen prisoners bodies were found abandoned in S-21 when the Vietnamese troops first discovered the facilities in 1979. After visitors have the opportunity to pay respects to the last prisoners, visitors can continue to embark upon the more squeamish exhibits. The prison itself has four buildings organized in U-shape but the administration office (also the admissions booth) breaks the U-shaped layout into a W-shaped layout. The buildings are respectively labeled from A through D.

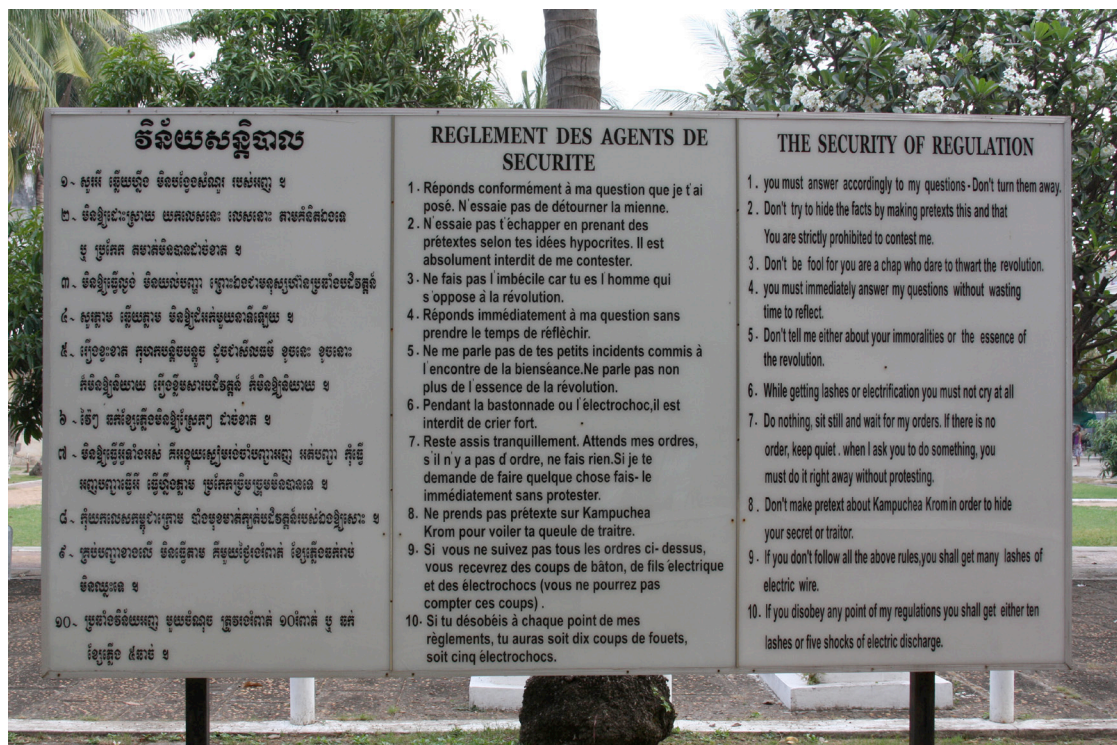


Figure 4: Tuol Sleng - The Security of Regulations

Building A

Hanging right outside this building, a board entitled, “The Security of Regulations” give a glimpse of prisoner’s life²⁹ (please refer to Figure 4 on page 58). This first building detained prisoners who held high official posts. Each room is still equipped with a bare metal bed, torture instruments, and a photograph of the room in its original state hung on the wall from the aforementioned two Vietnamese photojournalist. Faded bloodstains can be seen on the floor and walls, giving death an eerie present sense. During my visits, access to the upper floors was restricted to memorial-museum personnel. The floors above is said to have five large cells where people where shackled together in leg irons.

²⁹ During the ECCC’s trial, Kaing Guek Eav alias Duch alleges that “The Security Regulations” was fabricated by the Vietnamese when they established a protectorate over Cambodia and created the Tuol Sleng Genocide Memorial (AFP 2009, under “Vietnam fabricated KRouge prison ‘rules’: Duch”). Here, if true, we have a glimpse of an invention of memory. The origin of invented traditions is normally derived from significant events, which has been fictitiously but continuously commemorated. They extend historical significance to traditions that has not necessarily been remembered substantially. In a given tradition, society (in most instances, mostly individuals or groups of people) adds accessories, such as paraphernalia or rituals practices, to a tradition to make it more meaning. Traditions become codified into society by setting them as conventions and routines, which then gives the tradition a life of its own so it becomes easier to transmit or to pass on to new practitioners. As Hobsbawm and Ranger suggests in their book, *The Invention of Tradition*, society invents traditions as a tool to preserve history with three different types of traditions in mind: “a) those establishing or symbolizing social cohesion or the membership of groups, real or artificial communities, b) those establishing or legitimizing institutions, status or relations of authority, and c) those whose main purpose was socialization, the inculcation of beliefs, value systems and conventions of behavior” (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, 9). One public holiday actually demonstrates the Vietnamese attempt to create a whole new memory and tradition. On May 20, 1984, the Cambodian people celebrated their first public holiday, *T’veer Chong Kambaeng*, loosely but commonly translated as the “Day of Hatred” (Fawthrop and Jarvis 2004, 74). I would personally translate it as, “Door to Tie Anger.” The day was created to “allow people to vent their anger against Mr. Pol Pot and other enemies of the nation, including the ‘American imperialists’ and the ‘Chinese expansionists’” (UPI 1984, under “AROUND THE WORLD; Cambodian Day of Hate Marks Pol Pot’s Victims”). Since its creation by the government backed by the Vietnamese, people have celebrated the holiday by public demonstrations, often burning paper effigies of Pol Pot and anything else related to the Khmer Rouge. In 2001, the holiday was renamed the “Day of Remembrance” (Fawthrop and Jarvis 2004, 74).

Building B

Outside the second building is a hanging bar used for interrogation with two large jars underneath it. The second building contains photographs of prisoners, taken by prison worker, Nhem Ein³⁰ (please refer to Figure 5). Each prisoner arrived to S-21 blindfolded. The only time their blindfolds came off was when their photograph was taken or when they were interrogated (Williams 2008, 64).



Figure 5: Tuol Sleng - Photographs by Nhem Ein

Two rows of headshots of prisoners lined the first room, categorized by the year the photographs were taken: 1975, 1976, 1977, and 1978; or by

³⁰ Twenty-two photographs selected by Chris Riley and Doug Niven from of Nhem Ein's photographs was featured as an exhibit entitled, "Facing Death: Photographs from S21: 1975 – 1979," at Museum of Modern Art in New York City, New York. The photographs were well received and critiqued as fine art (Williams 2004, 244). He started working for the Khmer Rouge at the age of nine in 1970 when they recruited him as drummer. When he turned sixteen, they sent him to China to study photography for seven months (Mydans 2007).

prisoners' social groups: children of political prisoners, Khmer Rouge Comrades who were accused of betraying the Party, and forced-labor camp cooks who were accused or caught taking too much food from Angkar. Most of the photographs are headshots with only a number distinguishing one individual from another. Some of the photographs depict people being interrogated, tortured, killed, et al.

To older Cambodian visitors, the pictures are stark reminders that they could have been that person in the photograph. Any act of survival constituted treason. People from all parts of the country during Pol Pot's reign were brought into S-21 for treason. Angkar charged them with treason for the most miniscule acts, such as taking extra rations, or for uncontrollable events, such as not producing enough rice during the harvesting season.

The far end of the second building contains foot shackles for less important prisoners who were chained together by foot along the floor. Floor hooks held the shackles in place and organized the prisoners in neat rows. In the corner of the room are stones carvings by Im Chhan³¹ of the Party leader's head: Pol Pot, Brother Number One.

Building C

Barbed wire lined the exterior of the third building to discourage prisoners from committing suicide (please refer to Figure 6 on page 62). The building itself contains small individual cells for more important prisoners. The first floor individual cells are made of brick. The second floor individual cells are made of wood. The size of the individual rooms is just about the

³¹ Im Chhan is one of the survivors of Tuol Sleng. Prison guards tortured him for twenty-six days before they ordered him to carve images of Pol Pot. He studied carving at the Cambodian Fine Arts Academy.

size of a janitor's closet. Some has windows so prisoners can look outside while others were closed off completely from the outside world (please refer to Figure 7 on page 63).



Figure 6: Tuol Sleng - Building C with Barbed Wire

During my April 2008 visit, a third floor room hosted the 2003 documentary, *S-21: The Khmer Rouge Killing Machine*, by Rithy Path, in English. The documentary focuses on the survivors and former jailers feelings about S-21. Survivors want to use Tuol Sleng as a warning to future generations while former jailers allegedly still feel guilt from participating in the atrocity. The room featuring the document resembled its historic classroom with chairs arranged from wall to wall. Only a narrow passage along the sides of the walls and down the middle of the classroom allowed visitors to pass through. Wall fans buzzed on both sides to accommodate foreigners who

were unused to the Southeast Asian climate.



Figure 7: Tuol Sleng - Brick Cell

Building D

The first room of the fourth building contains more photographs and also maps of the 1975 Phnom Penh evacuation pattern. Before the fall of the Lon Nol government, the Khmer Rouge collective had different factions, splitting Phnom Penh into different zones divided by major streets and highways amongst the different factions (Kiernan 1996, 53-54). The middle room contains a cabinet of torture instruments, as well as other interrogation devices paired with Vann Nath's paintings³² (please refer to Figure 8 on page

³² In museums, Vann Nath's paintings are controversial. Because he witnessed the atrocities at S-21, his art serves as witness. However, because his paintings are art, they are also considered fine art with an agenda. Without truly identifying the category of Vann Nath's paintings, museum attendees may not truly know how to comprehend his painting.

64). Vann Nath was one of the nine survivors who escaped S-21 on January 7, 1979 when the Vietnamese troops entered Phnom Penh. Because of his talent, his life was spared so he could paint portraits of Pol Pot. The last room on the first floor of the fourth building contains a stupa, as well as a cabinet that now houses the skulls that used to be part of the morbid skull map of Cambodia (please refer to Figure 9 on page 65). Mai Lam masterminded the skull map with the intention of having it serve as proof of the atrocities from the Democratic Kampuchea reign. Chey Sopheara, the



Figure 8: Tuol Sleng - One of Vann Nath's Paintings

director of the museum, decided to take down the map “to end the fear visitors have while visiting the museum” (AP 2002).

The second floor contained photographs and testimonies of S-21 workers. Each one of these biographies also has an accompanying blown up

photograph of the worker. Photographs have been horribly defaced with graffiti. One photograph of a young Khmer Rouge soldier have such messages as, “You who have no parents who are Khmer; You shallow



Figure 9: Tuol Sleng - Stupa and Skull Case

people; You corrupt people.” Although the language seem harmless when translated in English, the language is quite offensive in Khmer. The third floor contains new exhibits prepared by the Documentation Center of Cambodia (DC Cam). While I was there, it hosted pages from the book, *Stilled Lives: Photographs from the Cambodian Genocide*. Each page contains a story that the staff of DC Cam managed to piece together about S-21 prisoners.

CHAPTER 7

CHOEUNG EK GENOCIDAL CENTER

Since the fall of the Democratic Kampuchea, survivors have constructed over 81 genocide memorials throughout Cambodia (D.C. – Cam, 2008). Most of these memorials are just mass graves. Of the many mass graves, the Cambodian government operates only one site: Choeung Ek (alias the Killing Fields). S-21's crops disposal site is seventeen kilometers from Phnom Penh and falls within the municipality of Phnom Penh under the periphery of the Dang Kao district. Choeung Ek also employs locals as fulltime caretakers, tour guides, and guards over the memorial-museum grounds.

The Vietnamese authority discovered the Killing Fields at Choeung Ek one year after they liberated Cambodia in 1979. In 1980, they exhumed 89 mass graves out of 129 total mass graves, leaving 43 mass graves untouched (please refer to Figure 10 on page 67). The government finished transforming the mass grave into the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center in 1989. Since its inception and development, the center has been privatized and contracted to J.C. Royal, a joint Cambodian-Japanese corporation, for maintenance (Hughes 2004). To understand this area, I am going to discuss the history of Choeung Ek's peaceful past, the purpose during the Democratic Kampuchea's reign, the significance of the monument, and the drama.

The Peaceful Past

Prior to the rise of Democratic Kampuchea, the greater area of the Killing Fields at Choeung Ek served as an orchard. Remnants of the orchard

shadow the newly developed compound with fruit trees along the outskirts of the compound. An adjacent pond provided water for the orchard. The area also served as a Chinese graveyard. Due to the Khmer Rouge's intolerance of non-Cambodian Nationals, they desecrated Chinese tombs. Bits of cement tombstones scatter amongst the mass graves. Tombstones with Chinese characters protrude from the ground. To this day, Chinese-Cambodians who have relatives buried in the Killing Fields still celebrate the Qingming Festival by decorating graves with colored paper.



Figure 10: Choeung Ek - Mass Graves that were Exhumed

The Reign

Trucks transported political prisoners from S-21 to the Killing Fields in Choeung Ek. Since S-21 primarily tortured and executed high-level prisoners, low-level prisoners were sent to Choeung Ek for final execution.

Trucks arrived every two to three weeks carrying twenty to thirty blindfolded prisoners. During peak periods, 300 political prisoners arrived each day to the Killing Fields from S-21 as well as other prisons in the country. When executioners failed to kill them within a day, prisoners stayed in single cells in a detention center built of wood and a galvanized steel roof. Unfortunately for historians, the detention center was disassembled in 1979 (Hughes 2004).

The Monument

The Buddhist stupa (also known as *chedi*) is the highlight of the genocidal center (please refer to Figure 11 on page 69). Like the Tuol Sleng Genocidal Museum, Mai Lam envisioned Choeung Ek as a physical proof and crude reminder of Cambodia's fascist past. In the following section, I will discuss the monument's architectural design, the historical usage of stupas, and the secularized interpretation of the Choeung Ek stupa.

Architectural design

Mai Lam appointed architect Lim Ourk to design the stupa. Lim's contemporary design includes influences from traditional Buddhist temple pavilions and the Cambodian royal palace, like the Naga at the four corners at the base roof for protection as well as sky tassels to ward off spirits. The roof symbolically features representations of Mount Meru. The top spire alludes to the lotus, common images representing the royal monarchy and the sangha of monks. Like all other Southeast Asian temples, the roof also has Naga snakes for protection.



Figure 11: Choeung Ek - Stupa

Historical Stupa

The origin of the stupa predates Buddhism. People have historically built stupas to store ashes and charred remains and to earn merit. When the Buddha snuffed out to nirvana, he requested his disciples not to venerate his ashes and charred remains. This request raised issues of contention amongst the various princes of India. Accordingly, the princes built eight stupas at various places important to the Buddha's life. The Maurya Emperor, Aśoka, built more stupas in the third century BCE for people to venerate the Buddha by divvying the contents of seven of the eight original stupas to his

newly built stupas. Now, people associate stupas with the Buddha, as well as a place for veneration and a space for accessing the axis mundi (Mitra 1971, 8).

Even after many decades and transformations, the stupa still serves as a holding space of sacred objects in the Cambodian Theravada Buddhist tradition as in India. Cambodian stupas traditionally hold cremation remains of highly ranked monks and ecclesiastical officials but have spread to anyone who can afford a stupa – hence the plethora of stupas built next to wats in Cambodia. All stupas also share four relative architectural images: a womb, a temple, a sacred tree, and an image of the Buddha (Mitra 1971, 21). People believe stupas resemble the figure of the Buddha in a meditative pose. This notion also supports the idea that the dead's ashes return to creation by its placement in the "womb" of the Buddha – likening themselves to divinity.

Secularized Stupa

The contemporary design of the stupa at Choeung Ek breaks traditional norms. Spectators and venerators traditionally see stupas as a solid structure and holding place for a person's cremation or relics. At most, the stupas feature a window looking to an urn. The Choeung Ek contemporary stupa exhibits almost nine thousand skulls arranged by age and gender with a few bones and barbed wires used to cuff prisoners – all encased in glass within the middle chamber of the stupa. The skulls themselves were treated with chemicals for preservation (please refer to Figure 12 on page 71).

Many Cambodians rebuffs the idea of visiting the Killing Fields at Choeung Ek because they believe the area is haunted. Tradition and customs

calls for cremation of skulls and bones but the government refuses to follow those cultural norms; thus leaving the souls of the dead in limbo to walk on the earth. On the other hand, Cambodian youths who do not believe in the Pol Pot regime play hooky from school and use the mass graves as a playground. A Killing Fields guard reported that older disrespectful youths used to use the burial ground as a make-out point before J.C. Royal's decision to erect a gate and wall around the compound.



Figure 12: Choeung Ek - Stupa with Preserved Victims' Skulls

The Drama

On Friday, March 18th, 2005, the Phnom Penh municipality signed over operational rights of Choeung Ek to J.C. Royal, effective on Friday, April 1st, 2005. Through the contract, the government charged J.C. Royal with the responsibility to increase revenue, renovate, develop, and beautify

the mass graveyard. Prior to this agreement, Choeung Ek charged fifty cents for foreigners to visit the compounds. With this new agreement, they could charge three United States dollars. J.C. Royal must pay an annual fee up to fifteen thousand United States dollars to the municipal government in exchange for exclusive right over the proceeding thirty years. Currently, J.C. Royal receives eighteen thousand U.S. dollars in monthly revenue from foreigners (Saw 2008).

While the maintenance of Choeung Ek through its privatization may seem innocent, it reeks with corruption. Chea Vandeth, a Cabinet Chief for Prime Minister Hun Sen, serves as chairman of J.C. Royal. When Neang Say, a local farmer, reported the transaction to the international community, the Council of Ministers released a statement that said Vandeth would donate profits to the Sun Fund, an alleged philanthropic organization established by the Prime Minister in 2002. Say feels those actions disrespects the memory of the genocide in his comment, “I want the world to know that Cambodia has become a place where they use the bones of the dead to make business” (Doyle 2005).

CHAPTER 8

MEDIUM FOR INTERGENERATIONAL COMMUNICATION

During the whole duration of my field research, I noticed the majority of visitors were foreigners. Especially since the Khmer Rouge Genocide Tribunal had recently gained more international headline, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center received greater attention from tourists visiting Cambodia. Although Cambodian nationals also frequented the memorial museums, only a sprinkling of them appeared in the crowd of Caucasian faces. I accordingly grazed around the compounds of the genocidal center, listening closely to people talk about various exhibits. I paid special attention to Cambodian Nationals talking about the exhibits.

I posit that museums serve as a second-generation witness. Victims, like my parents, cannot serve as first-generation witnesses; their experiences traumatized them too much – sometimes silencing them completely. If first-generation witnesses chose to share stories with people, they tend to limit their scope of the story or share tidbits of stories relevant to the situation. No one can really speak for them. However, memorial museums, like the Cambodian American Heritage Museum and Killing Fields Memorial, the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum, and the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center end up filling this gap. Photos, human remains, and remnants of bones and blood serve as pieces of a narration – a narration without a voice. In the instances of Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek, the remnants became the exhibit.

Within a theoretical context, Maurice Halbwachs in his book, *On Collective Memory*, posits that other people or groups trigger an individual's memory. Because individuals tend to develop relationships with one another through a common interest, they tend to share similar but individual memories. Within a group setting, the group provides individuals with an avenue to reconstruct memory through their shared interests. Accordingly, as an individual recalls a memory, he places the memory contextually in the perspective of the group, thereby reconstructing the memory of the past into the present. This notion alludes that memories of the past are malleable and that memories are constantly changing to contextual itself to an individual in the present. (Halbwachs 1992, 37-40). In the instance of memorial museums, one must be aware of what the institution is trying to teach through its displays of exhibits. Because memory cannot exist outside the framework of societal determination and recollection (Halbwachs 1992, 43), one may end up being more willing to accept stories from any memorial or museum as truth. On a more positive note, museums and memorials can help keep the framework of such memories alive. As I walked through these memorial-museums, I witnessed these remnant-exhibits serve as a narrative tool: a parent-child visit, a little boy's interest, a casual stroll, and a non-government organization's involvement.

Parent-Child Visits

Although most S-21 visitors were foreigners, a small minority were Cambodian nationals. Besides the afternoon crowd of Cambodian national students, most Cambodian nationals visited S-21 as a family: either a mother (sometimes a father) taking her children to the museum or a child taking his

elderly parents to visit the museum. During my interview with adult Cambodians, they indicated that they had never visited S-21 before. Most of them were from far away villages but were visiting family and/or friends in Phnom Penh. Some Cambodians who even lived in Phnom Penh never had the time to visit S-21 until my visit. In one casual conversation with a woman in her late forties, she willingly told me her life story during the Pol Pot Regime without my inquiry. With tears in her eyes and a shaky voice, she said her father was a schoolteacher who was detained at S-21. Suspecting that he was going to be executed, her father sent her to the countryside to be with her relatives. Every year since the museum has been opened to Cambodian nationals, she brings her two daughters to the memorial museum to tell them stories about her father – their grandfather. Because of her Chinese heritage, she also visits the Killing Fields in Choeung Ek to give offerings to her deceased father and his newly acquainted spirit-friends during the Qingming Festival.

Halbwachs also looked at the framework of family memory through society's notion of what some information scientists refer to as "one-to-one relationships." In a one-to-one relationship, information (in this instance, memory) interpretation occurs when drawing a correlation between one data point (in this instance, a person) to another data point (another person). In the stance of the woman, her data points would either be her children, or even me by extension of my cultural heritage to Cambodia. Yet, even for individuals, I would disagree with Halbwachs. If one were to think of individual memorials or museums as an living entity in itself, these memorial museums can also serve as a data point for one-to-one relationships. Without establishing the relationship/correlation, the memory cannot exist

by itself. The memory needs both persons and/or points to exist – memorials and museums certainly do facilitate this. (Halbwachs 54)

A Little Boy's Interest

One day during fieldwork, I ran into a young boy, twelve years of age, and his parents. They lived in Takeo but came to Phnom Penh for a relative's wedding. The large sign on the main road drew the little boy's attention. His parents said he pleaded with them to visit the center. He wanted to bare witness the site of atrocity. He wanted to see if his parents' stories proved true. Before I decided to engage them in a conversation, I stood near by listening to their conversation.

Near the exhibit where Khmer Rouge guards smashed little kids' heads along the tree trunk to kill them, the father told the little boy a story about "pineapple eyes." The father said that his mother (hereon referred to as grandma) received favors from her presiding Khmer Rouge officer. During meal breaks, grandma took miniscule yet inconspicuous amounts of rice for her personal storage. About every two weeks in the darkness of night, she would enter into the father's camp to give him the additional grains. After every single visit, she would always convey the same message, "Don't mention this to anyone – not even your little brother. If you do, he will get excited. Even if he doesn't say anything, the guards would sense his excitement and they will kill me."

A Casual Stroll

Not too far from the location of the narrative where I heard "A Little Boy's Interest," I trailed behind two men dressed like Cambodian officials: plain dark greenish-tan clothes with a pocket on both sides of his breast as

well as both sides of his lower abdominals. One of them shared a story of how he received special attention from the Comrades. He says he was a friend of a comrade during the days before the Khmer Rouge. Before the comrade was sent off to another commune, the comrade instructed another comrade to take care of the one man – but not to the man’s knowledge. One day, a Comrade asked the man, “are you Suong?” The man said “yes” but thought to himself, “oh my god, they’re going to kill me today.” The comrade said, “okay, follow me up here.” The comrade led the man up into a hut. Upon entering the hut, the comrade said to the man, “Everyone receives a ration. Leaders like us receive a little more.” From thereon, he always received extra rations.

This narrative had me curious about whether one tends to embellish stories. Once again, borrowing from Halbwachs's theoretical perspective, Halbwachs suggests that older people reconstruct memory with the assistance of other older people. In this case, the two officials were bouncing of stories from each other. Halbwach asserts that during memory reconstruction and recall, people tend to embellish or touch-up memory to give it prestige that ordinary reality could not. This perhaps gives them joy because the act of recalling allows them to escape from the present to the past. (Halbwach 1992, 47-51)

Non-Government Organization’s Involvement

During one of my visits to the mass grave, I encountered a foreign non-government organization that brought elderly villagers from the province of Kampong Thom to visit the Tuol Sleng Genocidal Center and the Killing Fields in Choeung Ek. The NGO empowers the elderly villagers

to create a plan to revisit traumatic memory in hopes of healing. This closely aligns with Halbwachs' notion on localized memory within groups. When people recall memories, they adopt a group's interest and reflect them back through the group's social lens, regardless of old or new memories. This allows a single memory to adapt to any group's interest/identity framework. From visiting both memorial museums, these group of elderly villagers relive single memories of the genocide together (Halbwachs 1992, 52). Mind you, this group of villagers chose to visit S-21 and the Killing Fields. Because of the emotional volatility of the elderly, the NGO hired both foreign and Cambodian psychotherapists and nurses to carry out this plan. The NGO staff took pictures of the villagers interacting in the memorial museums: some people were fine while others had violent ab reactions. A coordinator told me that the pictures serve as evidence to support the elderly villagers' testimonies to the younger generation. Many of the elders' children and grandchildren do not believe that the Pol Pot regime really occurred.

CHAPTER 10

CONCLUSION

Young Cambodians and Cambodian-American should know about the Cambodian genocide and the Khmer Rouge. While some may have heard bits and pieces of memory from their family, the majority has not received a solid understanding of their cultural history – not even in school.³³ Yet, because cultural memory is a pervasive aspect in community, many people can feel its un/conscious presence. It ebbs its way into people's lives, from simple, routine acts such as commuting to work to major decisions like voting on Constitutional amendments or addendums. Museums and memorials help service communities by acting as a vehicle for transmitting cultural memory. It provides memory the necessary space and architecture for people to project and/or fill-in. In a way, it allows people to re/create memory. Some memorials and museums curators have learned to take advantage of this by making their space more interactive and more community oriented. Because many common folk view museums and memorials as an institution that purports truth, they are kernels in the social production of memory, giving memory a place to contextualize, to fizzle, and to take shape. People go to them vulnerable – eager to consume information.

This thesis attempts to demonstrate the power and influence of memorial museums in the lives of Cambodian genocide survivors and their offspring in disseminating cultural memory. To help readers contextualize

³³ The current Cambodian government does not have structures in place to force children and young adolescents to attend compulsory school. Corruption has also stopped children from advancing their education because some teachers will demand a bribe from families to pass a student.

the genocide, I have given a brief biography of the Khmer Rouge mastermind, Pol Pot, in chapter one. Before I could fully explore the delusions of Khmer Rouge leadership in chapter three, I had to introduce Cambodia's political and economic history leading up to the Khmer Rouge takeover in chapter two. In chapter four, I discussed my methodology of collecting information from the four memorial-museums. In chapter five, I introduced the Cambodian American Heritage Museum & Killing Fields Memorial in Chicago, Illinois. I specifically mentioned that the Cambodian Association of Illinois integrates the memorial museum effectively into the lives of Cambodians, other immigrants, and the greater Chicago community by drawing people to the association for social services and the memorial museum space itself. In chapter six, I discussed how the Cambodian Cultural Museum and Killing Field Memorial in Seattle, Washington is used as a tool to justify destructive behavior found in some Cambodian-American youths to non-Cambodians Americans. In chapter seven, I wrote about the founding and use of Tuol Sleng Genocide Memorial as an embodiment of the illegitimate use of communist ideology by the Vietnamese. In chapter eight, I talked about Choeung Ek Genocidal Center's contemporary design faux pas and how it scares Cambodian nationals from visiting it. In chapter nine, I provided examples of intergenerational communication occurring at the Chicago and two Phnom Penh memorial-museums. These museums, even the Cambodian exhibit in the Wing Luke in Seattle have so much potential. While the Cambodian Association of Illinois could always continue to innovate to become a better medium for transmitting intergenerational communication, I would argue that they are *The Entity* for

which other curators or associations can model after.³⁴ Instead of focusing on the effectiveness of all these memorial museums in transmitting intergenerational communication, I would like to conclude and turn to aspects of how these memorial museums could be more effective. In the following section, I will discuss Cambodian's lack of free time, victims' consumption of visual commodities and hungry ghosts, bad political strategies, inaccessible resources, and intergenerational witnesses.

Lack of Free Time

Many economic factors serve to detract from the effectiveness of the Tuol Sleng Genocide Museum and the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center as a second-generational witness – or even an intergenerational witness.

Unfortunately, both memorial museums have a confusion of purpose: they serve mainly Europeans as part of a pilgrimage³⁵ in Cambodia. In Phnom Penh, most Cambodians work as merchants while those outside the capital tend to be farmers. If people are not entrepreneurs working at their business or on their farm, they are busy providing fourteen-hour (or longer) labor days to some other business owner. Simply put: they have no time to visit memorial museums. They have time off only during the Cambodian New

³⁴ In asserting that the Chicago memorial museum as the model memorial museum, I will not omit discussion of the Seattle memorial museum because they are no longer their own entity. Their role and identity have shifted to become a museum strictly dispensing information about *the Cambodian-American experience* – not about the Khmer Rouge or the Cambodian genocide; anything about the genocide would rather be a prelude to the American narrative and experience.

³⁵ Since the global economic crisis, Cambodia has noticed a dramatic drop in tourism. In 2008, two point one million people visited Cambodia. So far, within the first fiscal quarter, Cambodia has noticed that tourists from Japan and South Korea have dropped by one third, which constitutes about one hundred thousand visitors. Tour drivers in Siem Reap used to have three to four full busses a week. Now, they are lucky if they have one a week. The Cambodian government is trying hard to transform Cambodia into a tourist destination instead of a stop on tourists' pilgrimage of Thailand or Southeast Asia. A third of Cambodia's tourists come from tourists visiting Thailand (Radio Australia 2009). Since the global economic crisis and political instability with Thailand's Red Shirt citizen movement is effecting Thailand's tourism, Cambodia has to make very difficult strategic decisions about how to best attract tourists to the country.

Year. Because the pain and trauma still seem too fresh to many first-generation witnesses, they chose not to visit the memorial museums during their free time but to spend time with their families. The Cambodian New Year serves as the American equivalent of Thanksgiving. Blue-collared Cambodians return to the farms and the countryside to visit family. They hold more value in family time than in revisiting traumatic memories from the past.

As for their American counterparts, many Cambodian Americans do not want to visit S-21 or the Killing Fields. Many respondents who have not revisited Cambodia since their immigration to the United States commented that they do not want to visit the country that “destroyed their lives;” on the other hand, my parents normally revisit Cambodia at least once a year. Before they decided to take me with them on my first visit to Cambodia, they had never visited the memorial museums. Granted, they typically visited Cambodia for business, they allegedly skipped the memorial museums because they “didn’t know about it.” Other Cambodian American relatives may have been to the memorial museums but typically only once; as one of my uncles remarked, “once I’ve visited it, I do not need to visit it again.” When I asked relatives who live in Cambodia why they did not visit the museum, they commented that they “had seen enough atrocity during Pol Pol” that they didn’t need to revisit these memorial museums. Surely, if my relatives and other Khmers were more willing to retouch their traumatic past – especially in educating their children and/or grandchildren. I feel as though they would re/visit these memorial museums to make sure of them as mediums to transmit intergenerational communication, much like the Chicago memorial museum.

Visual Commodity and Hungry Ghosts

The Cambodian people perhaps are not yet ready to move on with the installation of the memorial museums. The display of victims' remains in both memorial museums undermines their trauma as a visual commodity. Victims did not receive a proper Theravada Buddhist burial. When Vietnamese archeologists exhumed victims' bodies, many Cambodians expressed concerns over this religious controversy; by disturbing their graves, they are disturbing the dead; thereby, releasing ghosts into the world. Now victim's skulls lay upon the shelves of the skull case in Tuol Sleng and the Choeung Ek stupa – never to be at rest. While many Khmer families choose not to bury family members without cremating them, separating the skull from the rest of the body is also considered taboo in Khmer culture. Furthermore, because the government never buried the dead's *teeat* (translated: source), their soul remains on earth – free to roam around.

This goes back to the Buddhist idea of hungry ghosts. Hungry ghosts roam the earth searching for food. In some traditions, because they have necks too thin for food to pass and bloated stomachs, they need to find other sources of energy for not being able to eat food. Since living humans have the ability to eat and process food into energy, they prey off people's life force energy, especially the weak or the ill. Some traditions hold that newly born babies draw hungry ghosts' attention. To counteract these measures, Cambodians wear charms and have their houses blessed by Buddhist monks.

Because of the genocide, many people fear visiting memorial museums. For the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center, even the secularized stupa with exhumed skulls in the heart of the stupa still has mana; it serves as an

axis mundi, connecting it with the spire to rain death everywhere. In the instance of the Killing Fields Memorial in Chicago, Illinois, Cambodian Americans believe that the memorial itself draws hungry ghosts to the site. They do not want to risk sickness or death by visiting the memorial. As with Tuol Sleng, many Cambodians fear that the murders are too recent – ghosts are more likely to return to their site of death. If they are not at the site of their death, they are likely at the site of their burial, like the Killing Fields at Choeung Ek. Some Cambodians avoid the two memorial museums completely.

Bad Political Strategy

Some older Cambodians believe that the genocide centers were a political strategy gone wrong: that the Vietnamese who were supporters of the Khmer Rouge masterminded the memorial museums. In an attempt to demonstrate their unhappiness over the Vietnamese influence over the Cambodian government, they may have boycotted these memorial museums out of principle. International commercialization also becomes an issue: one could argue that J.C. Royal transformed the Khmer people's trauma into a sensational exhibit. Can the Choeung Ek Genocidal Center truly be representative of the 1.6 million dead? Only 18,000 people walked through the gates of S-21 (and later buried at Choeung Ek), constituting 1% of the whole genocide. Surely, not everyone can relate to the traumas that these political prisoners experienced. These two memorial museums highlights the torture and execution of people during Pol Pot, not the agrarian state and the forced labor camps that contributed to the remaining 98.9% deaths during the genocide. Tuol Sleng suffers from the same symptoms as

Choeung Ek but has not been made private. International intervention have stopped the government from privatizing Tuol Sleng thus far but given the country's economic situation, it may not be long before visitors see major changes to Tuol Sleng.

Inaccessible Resources

Much international light has been placed on the Cambodian Ministry of Education itself. The international community wants schools to teach young people about the atrocity – not just surviving relatives. At the time of writing this thesis, schoolteachers were forbidden to teach Cambodian history between 1975 and 1979. Teachers were only allowed to give a very quick and glossy coverage of that time period. This leaves parents with the sole responsibility of teaching their children about the Pol Pot Regime. Even though the Documentation Center of Cambodia has created a textbook to be used in high schools, teachers are forbidden to distribute the textbook in class. In a discussion with a 19-year old Cambodian girl in Phnom Penh, she said that she and her peers believe that the history of the Pol Pot Regime is a cultish hoax. She believes that the generation before her created a myth. With true sincerity, she questioned, “How can Khmer people simply let this happen to other Khmer people?” Her knowledge of the Pol Pot Regime has been limited to her parents’ and relatives’ account, which all seemed hearsay to her. Although she has access to western books that provide a detailed analysis of this historical period, she lacks the English fluency to read them. I admit, I forgot to ask her whether her parents had ever accompanied her to the memorial museums. I am curious whether her experience and her belief would change if she saw her relatives interact with the exhibits.

Second-Generation Witness

For Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek to be an effective second-generational witness, they need to shift their focus back on the Khmer people and be more inclusive. One could argue that the presence of tourists bombards Cambodian nationals with foreignness, which prevents them from frequenting the memorial museums. The Cambodian government also wants to privatize Tuol Sleng to draw more international tourism to Cambodia – further distancing Cambodian nationals from their own national sites. Choeung Ek's privatization to J.C. Royal was admittedly a success but remains controversial. Chea Vandeth, Cabinet Chief for Prime Minister Hun Sen, acts as chairman of J.C. Royal. This relationship clearly demonstrates conflict of interests. Nonetheless, for both Tuol Sleng and Choeung Ek to be effective mediums of transmitting cultural memory and inclusive of Cambodian nationals, parents and grandparents of survivors need to take the initiative to expose their children and grandchildren to these resources.

EPILOGUE

By the simple nature of memory, one can never escape it; with very act of thinking, we give life to memory by recalling it. In recalling the past, we modify it with our new understanding of the present. In thinking about our future, we must access our lexicon of past experiences. In doing so, we modify our future to align with our understanding of our past. Accordingly, we are always modifying the past and the future in the present. The discipline of psychology has already demonstrated that memory distortions develop over time (Schmolck, Buffalo, and Squire 2001). In the humanities and other social science discipline, Jacques Lacan has used linguistics to demonstrate that we are constantly changing our experiences. Based on his notion of the chain of signifier, I have come to realize that all of my action is dictated by inheritance of cultural memory from my parents and their parents before them and their parents before them... like Clifford Geertz's notion, "turtles all the way down" (Geertz 1973, 29).

Now that I am endowed with this piece of information that gives me insight into aspects of my behavior, I can be more conscious of my actions. I can only hope that other people will be able to make use of this work to either help memorial museums become effective mediums for intergenerational communication or help themselves be conscious of their behavior. I realized that I had omitted heaps of information about the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia and more detailed discussions about the Cambodian genocide history textbook³⁶. I had purposefully omitted them because of fear. Apparently, I am an active

³⁶ Only in 2010 has the Ministry of Education finally started to dispense the official (and government approved) textbook on the genocide to students.

member in Ângkar's "imagined community" in which I am only recapitulating my inherited cultural memory. I am fearful of writing the truth. As an aspiring scholar, I do not want to face political strife nor have immigration issues whenever I visit Cambodia. For example, recently in 2009 up to the writing of this epilogue, Mu Sochua, an elected member of the Cambodian Parliament, sued Prime Minister Hun Sen for defamation when he called her a *cheung klang* (translates: "strong leg," derogatory in Cambodian context) in public. The government filed a counter-suit for defamation of the Prime Minister. Hun Sen immediately had the National Assembly vote to lift parliamentary immunity from Sochua, had the courts convict her for defamation, and fined her for 16.5 million riels (US\$3,895). If she refuses to pay, she would have to serve time in jail. In the midst of her legal battle over this defamation suit, her lawyer dropped his representation when he was threatened with a defamation suit from the government and disbarment from the Cambodian Bar Association. In another example, just this summer, one of my colleagues, who is a Myanmar (alias Burma) scholar, was banned from entering the country because she wrote something critical about the government in an academic article. I am curious whether she can continue to do academic work on this country. While I fear that I may face legal and political issue for publishing criticisms of any sort, I am also fearful of being banned from entering Cambodia. For this reason, I consciously but grudgingly chose to be an active member in Ângkar's "imagined community."

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